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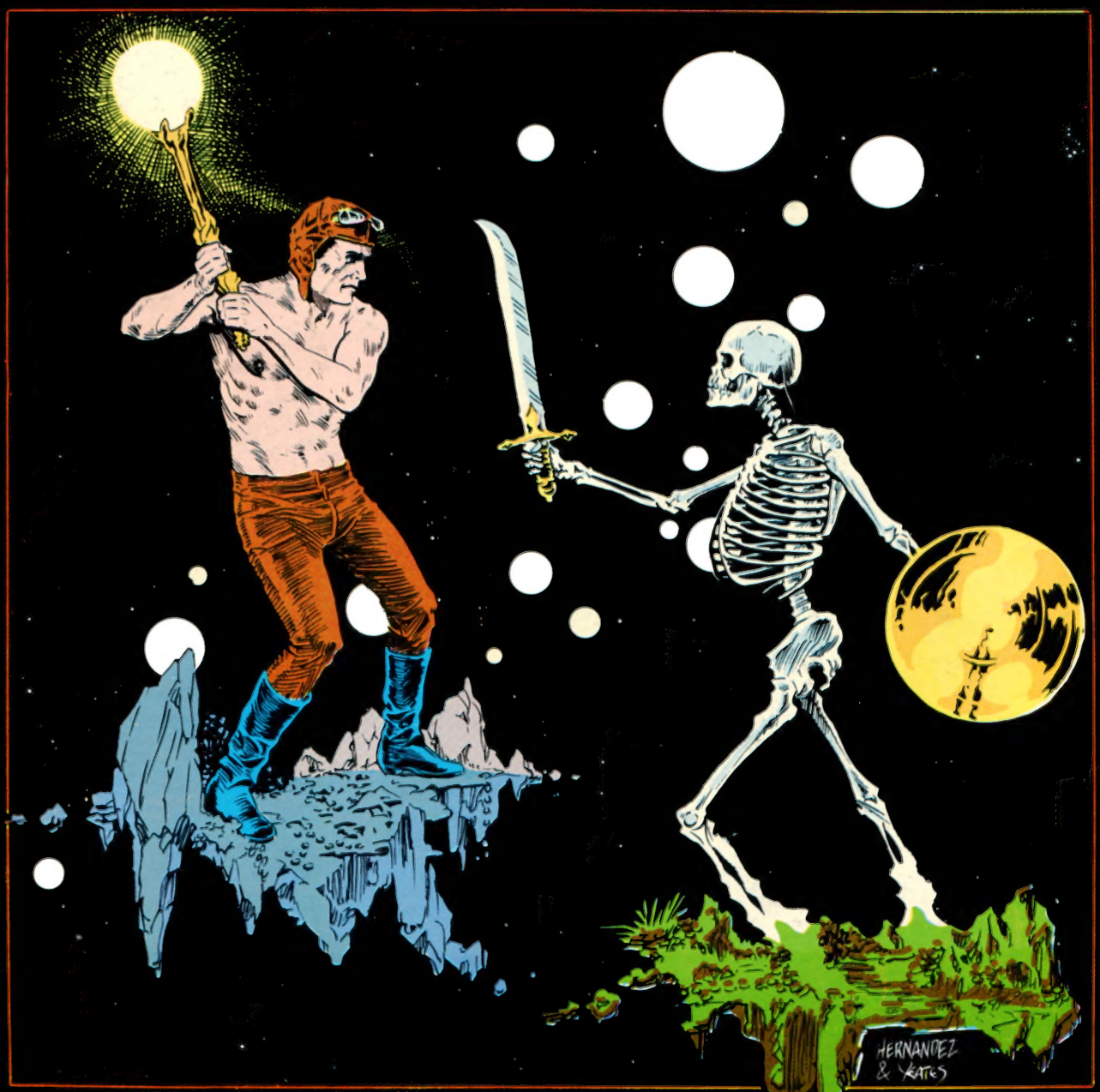

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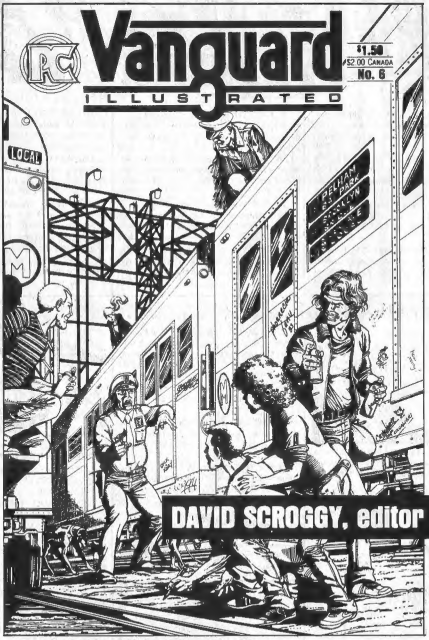

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UP FRONT

Who is Bill Chadwick — ?

Even though Bill's been associated with almost every issue of COMICS INTERVIEW, *editing an occasional transcript before becoming managing editor with #5, I've yet to introduce him here — mainly because Bill already made his bow in #1, as our very first "Fan in the Street." But a lot's happened since then, so I've asked Bill a few questions to bring us up to date with his latest thoughts on comics . . .*

DAK: *A little over a year ago, the only comic you read regularly was CHIP'N' DALE. Has that changed?*

BILL: Well, I still read CHIP'N'DALE when I can find copies, but now I try to keep up with *all* the titles coming out each month — mainstream and independent — even though that's practically *impossible!*

DAK: *Which ones do you like?*

BILL: ELFQUEST, much to my surprise — I expected it to be cute, but found instead a real blood-and-guts saga filled with characters I like and care about. I like **Doug Moench**'s BATMAN and DETECTIVE, and am very excited about **Simonson**'s THOR. The "Beta-Ray Bill" storyline was one of the great Romantic stories in recent comics.

What else? Let's see . . . JOURNEY, **Jaxon**'s COMANCHE and TEJANOS books, and I especially like EVANGELINE. I enjoyed Chapter One of the Carlos McLlyr series in ECLIPSE. I like MS. TREE. I wish there were more good frontier-adventure and mystery-suspense comics, though I like superheroes, too: SUPERMAN, BATMAN & THE OUTSIDERS, GREEN LANTERN, and X-MEN (but trying to get back into that comic, with all its convoluted subplots, has been difficult).

DAK: *What makes you like a book?*

BILL: I tend to like the same things in comics that I like in regular fiction: a healthy, affirmative sense of life, fast-moving plots, and larger-than-life heroes and struggles. In short, I prefer Romanticism to "Realism."

DAK: *Then you prefer simple Good Guy versus Bad Guy melodramas to more complex stories?*

BILL: Not necessarily. The early SPIDER-MAN stories that I remember from my youth showed a fallible yet heroic individual struggling to overcome his own weaknesses. That's a struggle that can be as heroic as punching out a super-villain. Heroes needn't be gods. But they should exemplify some ideal to which men and women can aspire or emulate.

Next issue: A big surprise announcement about COMICS INTERVIEW!

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Ramon & Shawnee

"Anyone who likes the best aspects of my work will be led to the Promised Land by

AZTEC ACE

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I've never met Doug Moench — but have been reading his comics work for over ten years. When I was editor of COMICS SCENE, we finally started conversing by phone in late 1982, as a result of his leaving Marvel. Our conversations were business-like but pleasant and I always wanted an opportunity to speak with him at length. Then, I promised Dean Mullaney of Eclipse that I would do major preview coverage of AZTEC ACE in COMICS SCENE, but we all know what happened — the comic was delayed and the magazine cancelled.

However, I got to make good my promise to Dean, anyway, when Doug and I spoke one Sunday afternoon. The conversation was, as I expected, interesting and delightful. Doug's enthusiasm for AZTEC ACE — his unusual time-travel adventure series for Eclipse — became infectious, as his fast-moving intellect raced across a cosmos of mind-stretching concepts, from conspiracy theory to the tantalizing phenomenon of "synhronicity"...

BOB GREENBERGER: *Let's start with the origins of AZTEC ACE, okay?*

DOUG MOENCH: Sure. The concept and character derives from thousands of different places as well as thousands of different times in my life, not to mention history, past and future. In pragmatic terms, AZTEC ACE comes from an unwillingness on my part, after what happened with MOON KNIGHT and

"AZTEC ACE is traditional enough to

WEIRDWORLD at Marvel, to give away another creation. Anyway, I've had the idea for AZTEC ACE for a long time now, stored away until the time — *ahem* — was right. Now it's right. In the beginning, when it was tentatively called CAPTAIN WOW, I envisioned it as much funkier and more cartoony. I don't know if you've ever seen the underground strip from the early Seventies called HAROLD HEDD.

BOB: *I have.*

DOUG: It's by a terrific cartoonist named **Rand Holmes** and he's like a bizarre combination of **Woody Wood** and **Berni Wrightson** — very clean inking lines with the expressiveness of extreme "cartoony" exaggeration, yet somehow still coming off as "realistic." **Corben** can do this too, and **Mike Ploog**, as well as a very few others — **Eisner**, sort of — and without exception, these guys are among my very favorite artists. They're able to do great adventure things which are also very cartoony and very funky at the same time. Another favorite of mine, **Carl Barks**, did stuff tangentially similar, but the difference in UNCLE SCROOGE was that the art was *totally* cartoony, with the adventure aspect confined to the plots, the writing. Anyway, when I ran CAPTAIN WOW through my head, the visuals were always an amalgam of **Ploog** and **Holmes, Wrightson** and **Corben.** When it came time to do it, however, I knew those guys were all involved with their own things, and I also knew that the likelihood of finding a new guy of their ilk was practically nil. And besides, the concept had begun to grow. I was getting more philosophical about Time. So, while I was still committed to doing something very offbeat and off-the-wall, with plenty of humor spicing the straighter adventure aspects, I decided that a more realistic art style would be the way to go. In fact, the disembodied head of **Sigmund Freud** floating around might be even *more* outre by virtue of a realistic style. This new "straighter" feel forced a change in the title. Also, by that time, CAPTAIN CARROT had come out and I wanted to avoid any similarities, not that CAPTAIN WOW was ever intended to be *that* cartoony.

BOB: *Do you feel freer to do "offbeat" stories working for Eclipse than, say, DC?*

DOUG: When people move away from Marvel or DC — and from the Comics Code — they always say they're going to do something which could never be done by the established companies. Usually they just end up simply adding more tits and violence. That was one thing I did not want to do — or at least it wasn't the *only* thing I wanted to do. I really *did* want to exploit the available freedom from formula and stupid editorial requisites. Now, some people may not agree that I've succeeded. They may think, "Well, this *could* be done by DC or Marvel," and maybe it could — it's just that it's not likely. And it wouldn't be done *in the same way.* There's a big difference in how something turns out when there's no one looking over your shoulder. And even when you have a simpatico editor like **Dick Giordano** or **Len Wein** or **Marv Wolfman**, I know I

Aztec Ace explains his philosophy. Art by Hernandez and Redondo. "AZTEC ACE is the ultimate period piece."

THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS IS ALL WE'VE GOT. I DON'T WANT IT TO INVARIBLY AND FALL APART.
OH, I DON'T MEAN I WOULDN'T STOP AN ACT OF SMALL, PERSONAL "EVIL" WHENEVER AND WHEREVER I FOUND IT-- INDEED, THAT'S MY OVERALL DESIGN IN OPPOSING NINE CROCODILE'S TAMPERING WITH TIME...
...BUT I'M NOT PREPARED TO VIOLATE THE TEMPORAL TAPESTRY OF ANY" SO-FOREIGN ERA. THAT'S KROW'S GAME -- AND A NASTY ONE.

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be commercial, yet it's very offbeat."

CHALK ONE UP FOR OUR SIDE--AND LEAVE IT TO ME TO PRESERVE HISTORY'S INTEGRITY BY AGGRAVATING PARADOX.
BORN IN THE RENTS OF TIME'S SHREDDING FABRIC, IT LACED INTO THE SHIP LIKE A VITIATION OF EVIL...
...AS IF ITS VERY LIFE INIMICALLY DEPENDED ON IT.
NAAHHHH
BATRACHIAN TENTACLES CRASHED BOW, MAINMAST, AND STERN, HALTING US DEAD IN THE WATER.

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Time travel has its perils. "I wanted the latitude to do any kind of story imaginable . . . every time period, every milieu." Hernandez and Redondo art for AZTEC ACE.

tend to make *myself* just a tiny bit more conservative, simply because those people have placed their trust in me and I feel an obligation not to hurl any curve balls in their direction.

BOB: *But you have full freedom in the concept for AZTEC ACE?*

DOUG: Fuller freedom I could not imagine. It evolved from a very hoggish — and I hope cunning — desire to have the best of both worlds, to have my cake and eat it, too. There are two things I wanted to combine — the benefit and appeal of a continuity deriving from the regular appearance of series characters over and over again, and the latitude to do any kind of story imaginable, literally every genre, every time period, every milieu, including the future. From dinosaurs to Vikings to Revolutionary War to near-future spy thrillers to far-future science fiction. History is now my playground — all of it, including my own imagined future history. AZTEC ACE is the ultimate period piece, as Cat and Dean like to say. If I want to do a Forties hardboiled private-eye story, I can do it. I can do a mummy story in ancient Egypt. The Napoleonic Wars. My version of LAST OF THE MOHICANS. The incredible Aztec empire, of course. A story on the **Kennedy** assassination. Ancient China and Japan. Spaceships and rayguns. And I even added a fantasy aspect — or at least *science*-fantasy — but I don't want to blow the suprise on that. Everything! Everything is *mine,* do you hear?! Megalomania rampant! Or as our local sportscaster says: I'm *pumped!*

BOB: *It sounds like it. Did you approach*

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"History is now my playground — all of it."

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Eclipse or did Dean come looking for you?

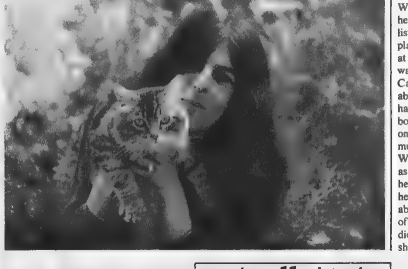
DOUG: Well, way back before **Dean Mullaney** even started Eclipse, when he was just planning it, I was one of the first ones he contacted. And I'd been hoping to do something for him ever since then. Dean's got a very good head and he's loose. He reminds me of my friends in the Sixties, who have all either disappeared or changed into tight-assed executives or plumbers or whatever. I like the guy a lot, even if he has beaten me a few times on my own pinball machine. But anyway, I just never had the time to start something new for him. Finally, when I quit Marvel and came out from under the shadows to gulp some fresh air, I had the time. **Cat Yronwode** contacted me the day I quit and we started talking.

BOB: *Since she is acting as editor on this book does she have creative input?*

DOUG: The answer is yes, but it's a strange situation, very atypical. There's an implicit understanding that she wouldn't even dream of forcing me to do something I didn't want to do and nor would she dream of censoring me. She knows my work — and she knows me — well enough to know that I very probably would never do something that would violate her editorial conscience. Anyway, Cat was tickled pink by my concept. It was like lighting a fire under her and watching her glow. There were sparks and she started spewing ancillary ideas. It was like she wanted to be the editor solely because she thought it would be so much *fun*. That was great, very refreshing. It was the first time someone wanted to be my editor simply because . . . I take it back. **Ralph Macchio** called me up once and said, "They gave me my choice of one book to edit and I picked MASTER OF KUNG FU because it's the best book we're doing and editing it will be easy. All I have to do is mail your plots off to **Gene Day**, sit back, and let you guys make me look great." The difference with AZTEC ACE is that **Cat Yronwode** does *not* sit back. She helps. Rarely does a week go by when she doesn't send me *some* kind of cryptica she's come across.

You see, in dealing with so many different time periods, I'm slowly but surely becoming a research fiend — but even so, the details of any particular year in the past are overwhelming. What kind of cigarettes would someone smoke in 1929? What kind of hat would she wear? What song was Number One on the hit parade? Did the hit parade even *exist* in 1929? Cat helps with these things. Her strong point is pop culture and she can tell you everything you need to know about a 1953 Wurlitzer jukebox — including what tunes should be stocked in it. Now, *I* know some of this stuff too, and I can research some of the rest of it, but my memory is bad and sometimes reference is unavailable — but Cat will either know it or find it. Do a story about the 1939 World's Fair and watch your mailbox, here it comes — a brochure from Cat listing the seventy-nine different types of plastic in use in 1939 and/or introduced at the World's Fair. Did you know there was a type of plastic called nixonite? Cat'll tell you all about it. But you asked about *creative* input — and yes, she does have that, too. Cat sends ideas, springboards for possible stories, amplifications on my ideas, even just her own wistful musings on the nature of time and nostalgia. When she first started doing this, she asked me if it was okay, did I mind? I told her of course I didn't mind, but warned her that I had my own very firm ideas about the strip and didn't know how many of her ideas I'd be able to use. In effect, I didn't want her "wasting her time." But she enjoys writing these ideas occasionally

AZTEC ACE's editor, Cat Yronwode.



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"In the beginning I envisioned it funkier."

and I enjoy reading them, if nothing else. Sometimes they'll spark a different but related notion in *my* mind — so she does have input, both literally and figuratively.

BOB: *Although Dan Day is taking over as penciller as of issue #3, Mike Hernandez pencilled the first two issues. Did you have any preconceived visual notions that you could describe to Mike, or did the visual ideas come from him?*

DOUG: Both. We were presented with a real stickler inherent in the very concept — the notion of having regular characters who appear in different milieux. In a Philip Marlowe hardboiled dick story, Ace would naturally wear the double-breasted suit and the hat, and in a future science-fiction story he'll be wearing a skintight outfit with goggles and raygun or whatever. He's the same person, but he looks different in each setting, each story. This is the strength of drawing on any genre we feel like doing, but it simultaneously lacks the other strength I wanted — that of an identifiably continuing character. So we wanted him to have a regular outfit to wear when he's just being himself — a uniform, if not a costume in the superhero sense. His home base now is Tenochtitlan in Mexico in 1518 just before **Cortez** and the conquistadors arrive, so he's got his regular outfit of the Aztec nobility. But that was too extreme, and spoke too firmly of a single time and place. I wanted something more temporally neutral, something that wouldn't be *too* outlandish anywhere. And that was tough. Now, so many of our friends are artists that my wife Debra decided to get a sketchbook and have them fill it up. She's got drawings by everyone from **Ralph Bakshi** to **Paul Gulacy** to **Dave Graue**, the artist who's done ALLY OOP since **Hamlin**'s death. When **Mike Hernandez** first came out to the house, he was duly led to the sketchbook and a pen was stuck in his hand. He did a really nice piece — a woman in a fleece-lined leather jacket with a flier's cap and goggles. I took one look at it and said, "That's our neutral outfit for Ace and Bridget." So Michael originated the visual — but it was my idea to use it. Since then, **Dan Day** has modified it, and it'll probably be changed again — and again — until we get it perfect. As for the other visuals, everything was described in my plot, some times exhaustively, but when I asked for "a group of slightly futuristic punk-types from 1996," obviously Michael had to handle the details. And then there are those visuals which actually exist — Aztec pyramids, Big Ben, pirate ships — which are simply done from reference.

AH...YOU'RE NOT FINISHED.
YOU LIKE LONG BATHS, DO YOU?
OH HELL, THIS THING'S JUST TOO SMALL--
--AND YOU AND ME ARE GONNA GET IT ON SOONER OR LATER ANYWAY, RIGHT?

Bridget Kronopolous, Ace's ally.

BOB: *AZTEC ACE was supposed to premiere last summer, then this winter. What delayed the whole thing?*

DOUG: You'll remember I foresaw a problem in getting any of the "reality-cartoonists" like **Corben** or **Ploog**. I didn't even ask any of them: I *knew* they were busy or only interested in running their own shows. And when the decision was made to go for a straighter art style, I knew the same problems would exist. There are three kinds of artists who are both established and good: Those who are already booked solid, those who are only interested in writing their own stories, and those who cannot reliably meet a deadline. So forget all the big names. But then a lightbulb went on over my head and I remembered my best collaborations. Almost every one of them was with a new, young artist — someone who was yet to become jaded or burnt out — guys who were fresh, vigorous, enthusiastic, ready to conquer worlds. **Gulacy, Zeck, Mayerik, Ploog, Gene Day**, and so on. So what if they were a little rough around the edges? The compensation was in watching them bloom and flourish even as the collaboration proceeded. With each issue they got a little better and seeing this happen always inspired me to try to do a little better each time out. Also, their enthusiasm was something infectious which kept *me* from becoming jaded. The mere example of these young guys busting their buns month in and month out was better than a pep talk for me. Ergo, let's go for a young guy on AZTEC ACE, someone who's already good and who's obviously going to get better as we go along. Unfortunately — stupidly — it never even occurred to me that a *new* guy might not be able to meet a monthly deadline. All the new guys I'd ever worked with had done it — of course, years later, people like **Gulacy** and **Zeck** started telling me horror stories about being chained to the drawing board for 14 hours a day, getting back problems and ruining their eyes on KUNG FU pages. Anyway, **Dan Day** is now the artist and he fits the bill — a young guy who's good and is only going to get better — and, thank the Time Oracle, he seems to be able to meet the deadlines.

BUT HOW 'BOUT THE GAMES? Y'LIKE THEM TOO?
IN THE COURSE OF HISTORY, BRIDGET, SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE, AND THE APTEAL OF LIMBS IS HARDLY EXCLUDED.
I LIKE THEM VERY MUCH.
NOW...

BOB: *Dean showed me some of the pencils for the third issue — Dan Day's stuff is lovely.*

DOUG: Yeah, he apparently helped his brother Gene a lot. Certain things — especially the storytelling and layouts — look almost like Gene's work

BOB: *Was it your idea to go with Dan?*

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"ACE comes from an unwillingness on

I WILL NOT FAIL.
AND FRANKLIN WILL NOT SAIL.
MY MISSION, THEN: STOP THE DOPPLEGANGER FROM INTERFACING IN AMERICA'S RELATIONS WITH FRANCE...
THE MISSIONS OBSTACLE: ESCAPING KROK'S BIZARRE BACK YARD.
AND SINCE THE BEST WAY TO GET FROM HERE TO PHILLY HARBOR IN SEPTEMBER OF 1776 WAS THE CROOKED LINE OF A SHIFT-VEHICLE...
I CONTINUED CIRCLING BACK, AND I'LL SAY THIS MUCH FOR THE SYNCHRONOUS CITY-SHIP--IT BIGGER THAN NEW YORK AND THE BIG APPLE DOESN'T EVEN FLOAT!
SOME WOULD SAY IT'S SINKING.
© 1984 Moench/Hernandez

Aztec Ace discovers a sinister plot by a false Ben Franklin.

DOUG: Yes. Although I never met him in person, I felt very close to **Gene Day.** Some of that feeling has spilled over onto Dan.

BOB: *Dean tells me the book is going to appear every six weeks.*

DOUG: Well, we're being conservative, having learned our lesson on the first two issues. Dan was given five weeks to do #3 and it was returned in five weeks. Don't tell Dan, but if this keeps up, we're gonna see what happens if we tell him to do issue #5 or #6 in *four* weeks. Who knows? It could go monthly!

BOB: *Did you have much input in selecting Nestor Redondo for the inking?*

DOUG: No, that was entirely Cat and Dean's *coup.* Obviously, I yelped yes — with an exclamation point — when they proposed Nestor, but they're the ones who go to all the conventions and keep in contact with the various artists available. Nestor's inks on the first issue are *so gorgeous!*

BOB: *Are the stories going to be out and-out adventure stories, heavy character, or high drama?*

DOUG: All of the above. *(Laughter.)* I don't want this to sound like unadulterated hype, which is mainly why I've been avoiding interviews the past six or seven years, but I'm excited about AZTEC ACE. Let's just say the whole thing has a heavy coating of the Strange. Plots aside, the form of the strip itself warps time, albeit only at certain times, and the whole thing has a deeper cosmological meaning than the surface at first indicates. And yet it is still traditional enough to be commercial. What I mean is that although it is very offbeat and extremely strange, it's still coherent. It all makes perfect sense — even linear sense once you unravel all the skeins which have been twisted inside-out. AZTEC ACE can be enjoyed and perfectly understood on one reading — but it can be *fully appreciated* only on a second or third reading. To compensate for that — for the person who's unwilling

POOR BEN: WOULD HE NEVER GET TO FLY HIS KITE IN PEACE?
I WATCHED THE REVOLUTIONARY IMPOSTER DEPART, AND THE MUSIC WAS STILL SPLATTERED IN MY BRAIN--WITH NO VIABLE OPTIONS IN SIGHT...
DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE, CAZA...OR SHOULD I CALL YOU ACE?
YOU ARE FLYING THE LIQUID CORE OF FIVE CORRESPONDING IMPOSSIBILITIES ON MY CITY-SHIP! I AM KING HERE, ACE! I AM SUPREME IN THIS HEART OF CONCENTRIC PARADOX!
THIS PLACE IS NOWHERE AND NOWHEN, KROK--WHICH MAKES YOU NOTHING.
I AM THE INSTRUMENT OF YOUR INFINITE PAIN, CAZA! I AM THAT WHICH SHALL PRECLUDE YOUR ORIGIN!
NIGHTSHADE--KILL ME!
© 1984 Moench/Hernandez

my part to give away another creation."

to read it twice — I've tried to put *so much* into it that even one reading will give you more than most other comics around. Knock on wood, I hope, I hope.

BOB: *We know the hero, Ace, travels through time — but why?*

DOUG: The story is very convoluted, as is the nature of time, itself. All of history is in danger of being trashed by Doxie-Glitches, metaphysical things which take symbolic shape when spawned by paradox — that is, by violations of things in the past which we know were *not* violated. After discovering the key to time and space, Ace was forced to flee his native time which was — or will be — the 23rd Century. He is able to leave in the sole existing "prototype shift-vehicle" — my term for a time machine — which is the funky Azure Crosstime Express — whose acronym, you'll note, is A.C.E. In the tradition of my Mordillo character — naming a character after a foreign cartoonist — Ace's real name is Caza. Anyway, so abrupt was his departure that he was forced to leave the computer discs of his discovery behind, which are now in the possession of those who forced him to flee. Ironically, they are now able to improve on his discovery, producing more efficient shift-vehicles, while he is barred from returning to the technology which makes this possible. And meanwhile — for reasons I cannot yet reveal without blowing some nifty surprises — the mysterious group which invaded his lab and forced him to flee are now using improved shift-vehicles to rape history and produce Doxie-Glitches which will unravel the tapestry of time and space and make this room disappear a split second before *we* disappear along with everything else.

BOB: *Uh-oh.*

DOUG: So Ace takes refuge in Tenochtitlan, 1518, using a pyramid as a garage for his time machine. He's got to stop these depredations on time before the unravelling becomes too severe, before the tapestry of time and space is tattered beyond repair — and, of course, those who oppose him want to stop *him* before he can stop *them*.

BOB: *Who is the opposition, anyway?*

DOUG: I'll just say that the opposition is called the Ebonati, and they're led by a guy named Nine-Crocodile. I've corresponded with **Robert Anton Wilson** off and on and I'm heavily into the conspiracy trip of the Illuminati, if only for entertainment's sake. The Ebonati are my dark version of the Bavarian Illuminati, a secret society that some conspiracy buffs believe is the unseen Prime Mover behind a lot of the wars, revolutions and assassinations of the past two hundred years.

BOB: *Wilson's ILLUMINATI books go into "synchronicity," the theory of weird, seemingly meaningless coincidences — such as the eerie amount of times the number 23 turns up in history and literature. I guess since AZTEC ACE deals with time, synchronicity would be of particular interest to you?*

DOUG: I've had some pretty weird run-ins with synchronicity . . . enough to make me stop and wonder, at least once a week. I was born on the twenty-third of February. My first non-comics story, published five years before I even heard of the Illuminati, was called "23 on the 23rd." The story was a true account of all these weird synchronicities — I called them "coincidences" back then — that happened to me on my twenty-third birthday on February 23! This is just the beginning . . . but if I went on, everyone out there who hasn't read **Wilson's** books or doesn't know about the Illuminati or the Laws of 5 and 23 will be convinced I've looped off into utter hellbent gibberish. Enough. All will become clear — as well as more maddeningly mystifying — in AZTEC ACE.

BOB: *Ace stops in the 1930s and picks up a woman and brings her back in time — will she be a regular companion?*

DOUG: So far. Actually, Ace brings her back *and forward* in time. She is one of the two main characters, other than Ace himself — although the cast is already growing by leaps and bounds.

BOB: *And her name is . . .?*

DOUG: Bridget Kronopoulous. She's Greek by descent, but American by conditioning. She's from 1940, where and when she ran an antique shop in San Francisco. Part of her origin is a take-off on THE MALTESE FALCON. The first issue's story is "The Mexica Serpent" and it's about this small statue of the Aztec serpent-god, Quetzalcoatl, which has been stolen by the Ebonati. It finds its way into Bridget's antique shop — as does Ace, who is playing the role of T.A. Zek, a hardboiled private eye. Call Dean and I are all big on **Chandler** and **Hammett**, and we also get a kick out of the more execrable Thirties and Forties pulpsmiths from BLACK MASK and the other old dime magazines. Incidentally, why Bridget's removal from her native time of 1940 does not, in and of itself, constitute a huge paradox is grist for a lingering mystery which will eventually pay off in a big — and I hope poignant as well as shocking — way, somewhere around issue #'s 6, 7, or 8. She's turning into a good character but my goal is to shape her into a great one. She plays a big role in the third issue — "Mummy Dust" — even though she doesn't appear in the main storyline. She appears instead in a series of "Time-Out" sequences, time-stranded with Head — the third main character — in the fuel-less Azure Crosstime Express, stuck inside a Kansas City phone booth during the

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winter of 1955. The **Davy Crockett** craze becomes a thorn in her side.

BOB: *And Head is . . .?*

DOUG: Officially, "Tempus Fugit." He either is, or greatly resembles, the decapitated head of **Sigmund Freud** and he's kept inside a box, for all you return-to-the womb Freudians out there. Head, by the way, is none too pleased by all these revelations hinting that **Jung's** theories of synchronicity were correct, and he laments the fact that the jukebox in Ace's Anachrony Den is not stocked with the Vienna Waltz. Head can levitate himself, and he plugs into the headless android body which pilots the Azure Crosstime Express. He pretends to have the hots for Bridget, secure in the knowledge that he can't be expected to do anything about it if she should take up the challenge.

BOB: *Head is certainly one element that makes the book different.*

DOUG: One of at least twenty-three! Another one is the use of what I call "subtitle-captions." These are one-liners similar to all those ad taglines I wrote for THE COMIC BUYER'S GUIDE. Dean called up and said, "We want to run another full-page ad for AZTEC ACE, so could you come up with another tagline like that 'Making the past safe from the future' thing you did?" I said I'd try, hung up, called him back twenty minutes later and said, "Sorry, Dino, but I couldn't come up with a single tagline." He was momentarily crushed with disbelief. "You couldn't?" "Nope," I said, "but I *did* come up with *eighty-four* of 'em." That's how juiced I was on AZTEC ACE — and still am. I was scribbling the things so fast the paper was getting gouged — like I was possessed by some gonzo automatic-writing frenzy. I told Dean that he and Cat could pick and use their favorite out of the eighty-four, but what we *really* ought to do is use them *all*, or at least a good chunk of them, the cream of the weird crop. Instead of taking out a single full-page ad, we should buy a whole slew of tiny ads and sprinkle them through the magazine. You see I wanted an ad campaign to match the strangeness of the book itself — something unique, something to make the reader sit up and take notice. I also wanted to provoke a what-the-hell-is-this-all-about reaction. So the taglines themselves were all cryptic and enigmatic and outrageous, filled with puns and arcane references and so on — and the manner in which they were to be presented, the ad campaign itself, should also be strange. Cat and Dean thought it was a swell idea, and they ended up running maybe fifty or sixty of the things throughout those issues of THE COMIC BUYER'S GUIDE.

TEMPUS FUGIT
VINTAGE 1940, I'D SAY, WITHIN A DIFFERENTIAL OF PLUS OR MINUS TWELVE SECONDS.
AT LEAST THAT'S WHERE I SET THE CONTROLS.
REET SWEET, SUGAR POPS!

Introducing Tempus Fugit — a.k.a., the Head.

BOB: *Were there any influences on AZTEC ACE, other than Wilson's ILLUMINATI books?*

DOUG: My favorite newspaper adventure strip of all time, TERRY AND THE PIRATES. **Milton Caniff** is the only guy who ever made me *like* the syncopated rhythm of a daily three- or four-panel installment. The format is rarely mastered in other continuity strips and each day's break seems like an awkward intrusion. **Caniff** *used* the break as an asset, either to pique interest or simply as poetic punctuation — sometimes like the downbeat in music. I wanted to try my hand at capturing some of this in AZTEC ACE. I haven't truly succeeded — after all, I'm

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not doing a daily strip and why impose the structure of an alien format? — and I've decided to stop trying to do it, but what's happened is that I've captured the ghost of the effect, and it's evolved into something completely different and pleasing in its own right. Rather than an unvarying punctuation every fourth panel, AZTEC ACE's rhythm varies, with the downbeat falling sometimes only every two or three *pages*. Since the stories lack the daily break — the whole story is in one magazine in your hands, meant to be read continuously — I needed something to denote those demarcations, and that's where the subtitle-captions come into play. Some of them are taken from music — if you're a **Sam Cooke** or **Bob Dylan** fan you should get a kick out of them. There's about twenty of them sprinkled through each issue.

BOB: *It certainly sounds different!*

DOUG: Let me give you a sports analogy. Over the past five or six years the Philadelphia Seventy-Sixers had time and again come within a double-dribble or a blown free-throw of winning the NBA championship. It was frustrating. They kept coming *so close* — why couldn't they win it *all*? So this guy **Katz** buys the team last year and he decides the Seventy-Sixers need one thing only — a center with power and control. So he gets **Moses Malone**, the best center in basketball, and Moses promises the team that he will lead them to the Promised Land. And sure enough, last year the Sixers were a thing of beauty *and* raw power, smoothly working their way to ultimate triumph and the championship. Now, perhaps because I harbor an innate aversion to power and authority, my career has always lacked that one big triumph. I've never had the power and control to reach all the way to my personal championship. I've come close, I think, a number of times, but I've never quite captured it. But now Eclipse has bought my franchise on AZTEC ACE and they've provided me with — are you ready? — a *center of power and control*, and I'm here to tell you — just call me **"Moses" Moench** — that anyone who likes the best aspects of my work — the aspects of my work that *I* like — will be led to the Promised Land by AZTEC ACE. I mean it! *(Laughter.)*

END PART I

The tapes of the preceding interview were so garbled and blurred as to render virtually the entire thing indecipherable. Bob Greenberger went mad trying to transcribe the tapes. Bill Chadwick went mad trying to transcribe the tapes. Doug Moench went mad trying to read the transcriptions which had driven everybody mad. And nobody seemed to have the high-tech Rosetta Stone which would banish the madness. In the end, Doug was kind – and crazy — enough to reconstruct this first half of the interview by running the incomplete transcript through his typewriter, filling in the gaps by letting his fingers do the talking.

In Part II — if Doug is crazy enough to similarly reconstruct the rest of the interview — Moench discusses his other new projects such as SIX FROM SIRIUS, his collaboration with old partner Paul Gulacy for Archie Goodwin's EPIC line, and his projected new series for DC, as well as his upcoming work on BATMAN and THE OMEGA MEN. Rounding it all out are observations on his recent stint in Hollywood — writing the RED SONJA screenplay for Ralph Bakshi and Dino DeLaurentiis, a project destined perhaps never to reach your local silver screen.

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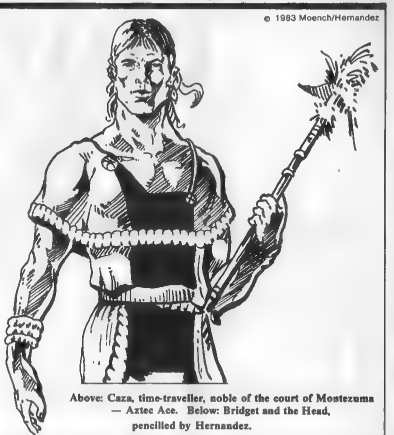

Above: Caza, time-traveller, noble of the court of Montezuma — Aztec Ace. Below: Bridget and the Head, pencilled by Hernandez.

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"SISTERHOOD OF STEEL deals with the

CHRISTY MARX

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Christy Marx
Occupation: Writer
Born: 6 June 1951 — Louisiana
Residence: Los Angeles, CA
Training: I had one year of college, then let the world teach me the rest.
Credits: CARLOS MCLLYR, SISTERHOOD OF STEEL, CONAN, SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, RED SONJA. Screenplay for SECRETS OF THE PHANTOM CAVERN (film in production).
Hobbies and Interests: Reading, fencing, archery, motorcycling, hunting, shooting, martial arts, and playing the Celtic harp.
Favorite Current Comics: THOR, GRIMJACK, JUDGE DREDD, X-MEN, and the MARADA THE SHE-WOLF series in EPIC.
Pet Peeve: When I'm deep in thought, I tend to frown, and people come along and go, "Why don't you smile?" I want to kill them. Then they think I really was in a bad mood when I wasn't.
Favorite President: Groucho Marx

If the Sisterhood of Steel (a new sword-and-sorcery series from Marvel's Epic line) really existed, creator Christy Marx would probably be a member. Like her fictional band of women-warriors, Christy has very "unladylike" interests: "I like to shoot guns. I like to fight with swords. I like archery. I like the martial arts. I guess you could call me a tomboy." When she's not wielding weapons, studying tae-kwan-do (Korean-style karate), riding her motorcycle — or playing the Celtic harp — Christy's busy at her typewriter, spinning stories of high adventure. Unlike some of the aloof Amazons of heroic fantasy, Christy is friendly, funny and down-to-earth, and graciously took time to chat with me about SISTERHOOD OF STEEL; her other new series, CARLOS MCLLYR, "a historical fantasy" of Old California (which will appear this Spring in ECLIPSE MONTHLY); and the role of women — as readers, as writers, and as characters — in comic books . . .

— Bill Chadwick

BILL CHADWICK: *Considering that Western comics are considered weak items in today's comics market, do you feel it takes a certain amount of gutsiness for you and Eclipse to be coming out with a series set on the frontier such as CARLOS McLLYR?*

CHRISTY MARX: I really would like to get across that we do not consider CARLOS McLLYR a Western. I realize the people are going to lump it into that category because the characters ride horses and shoot six-guns, but it is basically not a Western. We consider it a "historical fantasy." It isn't set in the Wild West, but in Old California, a time and place that hasn't been used much at all. It's a Spanish culture with all kinds of other influences acting on it — the Russians, the Americans, and the Indian culture. It was a very unique kind of place. There's also an undercurrent of Celtic mysticism to the story that makes it different. But, yes, people are going to say, "It's a Western," and, yes, it does take a certain amount of guts — especially on Eclipse's part — to be doing it, but Eclipse believes very strongly in the series, and they have a very strong commitment to it. They love the period as much as we do.

BILL: *How did you come up with the idea for CARLOS McLLYR?*

CHRISTY: My husband, **Peter Ledger** — who's illustrating and coloring the series — and I developed it together, as a result of working on a ZORRO newspaper strip. The man who owns the rights to ZORRO wanted to do it as a syndicated newspaper strip, and we went to work for him, developing sample strips that went around to the syndicates. The strip didn't sell, but it was a very good partnership. We did a tremendous amount of research into early California history, from the 1820s onward, for the ZORRO strip, and when the strip didn't go anywhere, Peter and I decided we really loved that time in history, and wanted to do something interesting with it. We also were very much into Celtic history, and decided to combine these two interests. And so we came up with the character of Carlos McLlyr, who's half-Irish and half-Spanish, and developed it from there.

BILL: *What kind of man is Carlos?*

CHRISTY: He comes from a well-to-do *ranchero* family, and he's a typical young *caballero.* He loves to ride, he loves to hunt, he loves the ladies and he loves having a good time. He's basically your young-adventurer type. And of course he'll have the combination of the Spanish and Irish temperament, which means that he'll be somewhat volatile.

inner battle of being a woman and a warrior."

Photo: Peter Ledger

BILL: *In other words, he's going to get into a lot of fights.* (Laughter.)

CHRISTY: He'll get into his share of trouble. His father was an Irishman who was kidnapped and brought to California by a pirate. There really was a pirate in the early 19th Century who raided and sacked up and down the California coast. He was a Frenchman named **DeBouchard.** Carlos' father ends up staying in Los Angeles, and he has with him this talisman, or amulet, which has a Celtic rune of great power upon it, and the power of the rune figures very heavily in the story. Anyone, including Americans, who wanted to stay in California at that time had to be Catholic or become Catholic. So Carlos has this Catholic background, and suddenly he's confronted by the power of this Celtic rune, which is a pagan thing to him. So it's going to be an interesting clash of these two major religions.

BILL: *The rune is where the fantasy element comes in, then?*

CHRISTY: It's very subtle, but it's definitely there.

BILL: *Anything more you can tell us about the rune, without blowing any vital plot twists?*

CHRISTY: Just that it has to do with a very big and very nasty grizzly bear.

BILL: *Which is the state symbol of California, right?*

CHRISTY: Yes. We have a lot of bears.

BILL: *I remember a fact strip in a ZORRO comic book which told how the grizzly bear became the symbol of California.*

CHRISTY: They were quite good, those Disney ZORRO comics. For the most part, they were pretty well-researched. I think **Alex Toth** drew some of them.

BILL: *Concerning your interest in Celtic culture, or are you of Celtic background?*

CHRISTY: I have more than my fair share of Viking blood in me, but it's more of a spiritual affinity than anything else. Peter has some Irish blood.

BILL: *I have some Irish blood. I have a jar of it in my bedroom.* (Laughter.) *An old Steve Allen joke. Who are some of the other characters?*

CHRISTY: The female character is named Sabina Chavez. Later she becomes a bandit — "La Bandita" — but in the first story she's just a young girl. She becomes involved in Carlos' quest for that grizzly bear. And there's Sargento Aragones, whom some of you may notice definitely resembles one of our favorite cartoonists. That's no accident — it's a tribute to **Sergio Aragones,** whom we love dearly.

BILL: *What kind of research did you do for this series?*

CHRISTY: We've gathered and read tons and tons of books on the period. We've visited historical spots in Los Angeles, photographed old homes, gone to the old missions. We are taking great pains to give it a detailed, accurate look. For example, there is a part in the story where Carlos goes to the San Gabriel Mission. Well, we went inside that mission, where you are not supposed to take pictures, and took pictures anyway. *(Laughter.)* We checked the mission out very carefully. We're staying away from the old romantic view of the missions that the *padres* were all wonderful and kind. We're trying to get a bit more realistic about it. I mean, obviously, it is a fantasy and there are points where we're going to stretch the truth a bit for the sake of dramatic storytelling, but I hope people will appreciate the realism in terms of details such as weaponry that we've worked on very hard.

BILL: *Because it was set in the same historical milieu, I was wondering if you happened to see the movie THE MASTER*

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"CARLOS McLLYR is an historical fantasy."

GUNFIGHTER, by Tom Laughlin, the guy who did BILLY JACK?

CHRISTY: I have had the — pleasure? *(laughter)* — of seeing THE MASTER GUNFIGHTER. I worked for **Tom Laughlin.** It was the first job I had in the film industry. I'm pretty sure I saw a screening of that film during the time I worked for him.

BILL: *How did you come to work for Laughlin?*

CHRISTY: Well, when I first came to Los Angeles, I had no particular skills and really didn't know I was going to be a writer. So I ended up in all sorts of things, including the life-insurance business. After a number of years in life insurance, I finally said, "I've got to get out of this!" I decided it was time I got into the film industry, and started sending out letters to people in the industry, and **Tom Laughlin** got a letter from me and interviewed me and liked me immediately, and hired me on the spot. I started in a secretarial position and was very quickly promoted, and started working with the man who was trying to distribute the third Billy Jack movie, BILLY JACK GOES TO WASHINGTON, which to this day hasn't been released. And I really hope it won't be.

BILL: *I was reading about that in a PEOPLE magazine piece about Laughlin recently, and he still has hopes of releasing it. He says it's the best picture he's ever made. Why don't you want to see it released?*

CHRISTY: I saw a rough cut of it, but I don't think there was much they could have done to help it. It has an anti-nuclear theme, so I suppose it could be considered very timely, yet it wasn't a particularly good movie. But Tom is a very good and very nice guy.

BILL: *How did you get from working for Tom Laughlin to working in comic books?*

CHRISTY: After I left Tom, I studied screenwriting and kept working in the industry. I went to work for **Charles Fries** Productions. They made the series of live SPIDER-MAN action shows. I worked for a lot of producers over at that company, and then got to reading scripts and became a professional script reader for Orion Pictures and a number of different places. Concurrent with all of that, I decided seriously that I was going to be a writer, and started working on screenplays, and then I met **Roy Thomas.** He had just moved to LA and I submitted some material to him. He thought I had potential, we met a few times, and he gave me a shot at writing for comics. And I did it.

BILL: *What was it that he gave you a shot at writing?*

CHRISTY: The story "Child of Sorcery" that appeared in SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #29 in 1978. I went on to do a couple of RED SONJA stories with Roy.

BILL: *Had you always been interested in sword-and-sorcery?*

CHRISTY: All my life I was pretty much of a science-fiction reader and did not discover sword-and-sorcery until the CONAN comic came out. But I'd been reading comics since I was twelve.

BILL: *How did you discover comics?*

CHRISTY: We were visiting my grandmother in Wisconsin, and she had a comic-book about a hero who was a jet pilot of some kind — maybe an Air Force pilot with wings on the front of his round helmet — with this sidekick, a little boy, I think. The story dealt with an indestructible robot who had turned on the scientist who had invented it and killed him. The robot supposedly had the most brilliant mind in existence, and it would go around to the most brilliant scientists on the entire planet and ask them a scientific question of great difficulty. When they couldn't answer it, the robot would kill them. Nothing could stop it. There was a great shot of the robot striding through a burning building, lit up by demonic fires. Wonderful stuff. In the end, our hero gets the

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"Red Sonja is running around

One of Mike Vosburg's first sketches for SISTERHOOD OF STEEL. "There's going to be a whole range of women in the Sisterhood."

robot into an arena and challenges the robot to the Ultimate Question.

BILL: *What is the Ultimate Question?*

CHRISTY: I don't know, because one of my cousins had torn it out of the book. *(Laughter.)* It was something like, "What is Love?" — one of those kind of questions. The robot couldn't answer it and got frustrated and literally tore itself to pieces. I remember the story quite clearly because the robot terrified me. But it was a great story. I decided the next time I went to see my grandmother, I had to have this comic. But by the time I visited her again, it was gone. And I've never seen it again.

BILL: *Well, maybe one of our readers can help you locate this beloved comic . . .*

CHRISTY: The other comic that got me interested in reading comic books was a SHOWCASE. I was in the fifth grade at school, lifted up the desk-top, and there it was. So I forgot all about class and spent the next half-hour peeking at this comic. It was a story about a team of adventurers, three men and a woman — a typical blonde. They find themselves in a prehistoric land, and the twist of this story is that they're inside a spaceship, and that the prehistoric land is somebody's collection of dinosaurs. I thought it was a great story, and after that I went out and started buying comics regularly. SUPERMAN, WORLD'S FINEST, JIMMY OLSEN, LOIS LANE, all the DCs until I saw my first Marvel Comic — which was FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL #1 — and then I went berserk and started buying mostly Marvels.

But in 1980 I happened to be visiting DC in New York City, and I mentioned the story about the dinosaurs, and whoever I was seeing at DC went to the record book and found that comic and showed it to me. This was the first time I'd seen it since the fifth grade. Now I realized the artist was **Ross Andru**, and it just happened that **Ross** was working in the other room. So immediately, like a fool — I'm a grown woman — I rushed into the other office and said, "**Mr. Andru,** I just discovered that you drew the first comic that I ever read!" This poor man is sitting there drawing Superman and probably wondering, "Who is this fool? *(Laughter.)* But he was very nice about it.

BILL: *When you made the decision to become a professional writer, was scripting comics your primary goal or did the opportunity just happen to open up through Roy Thomas?*

CHRISTY: I had grown up thinking I would write and draw comics. As it happened I have a minisicule talent for drawing, and fortunately I'm a much better writer. Writing comics was a dream, but if Roy hadn't given me the chance I may not have pursued it.

BILL: *Where did you go from doing the Red Sonja stories?*

CHRISTY: The problem I ran into is that Roy left Marvel. Even though I got a very nice reception when I visited New York, it didn't carry through in the form of more work. There wasn't that much of a tie between the East Coast and the West Coast at the time. So there really wasn't much comics work in the offing. As it was, I was developing my screenwriting career, and then sold my first screenplay. I was also writing Saturday-morning animation. And then **Mike Friedrich** came along and said he was becoming an agent in the comic-book field. I have known Mike ever since his STAR*REACH days — I had been writing to him since the first issue of STAR*REACH appeared. Because of all the changes in the comic-book field, with new companies such as First, Pacific and the others coming along, a whole new approach to comics had opened up, which made a big difference to me. I'd gotten to the point where work-for-hire didn't appeal to me much any more. It was thanks to **Mike** that I started thinking about doing comics again. And I developed my proposals, and by some amazing stroke of chance, both proposals sold.

BILL: *So Mike Friedrich was your agent*

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with a permanent chastity belt on!"

for both CARLOS McLLYR and SISTERHOOD OF STEEL?

CHRISTY: Yes. He's the one who connected me up to **Mike Vosburg,** who's illustrating SISTERHOOD OF STEEL. That's turned out very well. I'm thrilled to be working with Mike, who's a brilliant artist.

BILL: *What gave you the idea for SISTERHOOD OF STEEL?*

CHRISTY: That came about when I got really frustrated by the way Red Sonja was being handled. I didn't like her origin story because I didn't like this vague entity coming out of nowhere and giving her these abilities with no sort of explanation behind it. And I didn't like the fact that she can't have sex. The poor woman is running around with a permanent chastity belt on! *(Laughter.)* To me, she's not a woman. There's something wrong with somebody who has to be that way. But I still loved her and wanted to write her. Then I heard they were doing a new RED SONJA series, and I called up Marvel and said, "I'd like to write this stuff again." Unfortunately, it had already been assigned and I wasn't given the chance. So I just said, "The hell with it — I'm going to create my own character." At the time Peter, who's a bodybuilder, was putting together a layout for a bodybuilding poster called THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON. And I looked at that and thought, "Well, how about a female version — THE SISTERHOOD OF STEEL!"

BILL: *What is the Sisterhood of Steel?*

CHRISTY: The Sisterhood is a group of women who have a fortified island that they took over from a group of pirates and made their base. The story is set in a mythological world — not Earth-past but Earth-parallel, in a time roughly equivalent to the Roman-Greek-Byzantine period. The women fight with weapons of the time — swords, spears, bows, whatever — and they've formed this sisterhood so they can be independent and not be treated as second-class citizens or property. The Sisters go out and buy female children of about six to eight years of age, take them to the island, train them for their entire lives, so they grow up to be warriors. But they don't deny the fact that they're women. They try to deal with the aspects of being women in realistic fashion.

The main character is Boronwe, a young woman who's a good warrior, but who also likes to get out and mingle with men. She loves men, likes to go to bed with men, likes to enjoy herself, but she's tough, too. She can really fight. I want to have a lot of fun with the series and handle it in a way that really deals with the inner battle between being a woman and being a warrior.

BILL: *Situated on an island, how do they meet men? Do they import them, or go to the local singles bars?* (Laughter.)

CHRISTY: They don't import them. They go out and find them.

BILL: *"You — come with me, or I'll split your skull in two!"*

CHRISTY: There's going to be a whole range of women in the Sisterhood — there may be women who hate men, and women who love men. In any group you'll find a variety of people and a variety of attitudes. It'll be the same with the Sisterhood.

Ernie Chan art from "Child of Sorcery" (SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #28) — Christy's first story.

"AS I DREW UP BEFORE HIM, I MADE THE DRAGA-BODY AS SOLID AS I COULD, OVER THE INTERVENE DISTANCE.
"STILL, I MUST HAVE LOOKED WISPY AND GHOSTLIKE TO THE BARBARIAN.
"IT COULD NOT BE HELPED.
CROM'S DEVILS!
"AS HIS SWORD LEAPED INTO HIS HAND FASTER THAN MY EYE COULD FOLLOW, I FELT SURE OF MY CHOICE.
MAN OF THE OUTLANDS, I NEED YOUR HELP!

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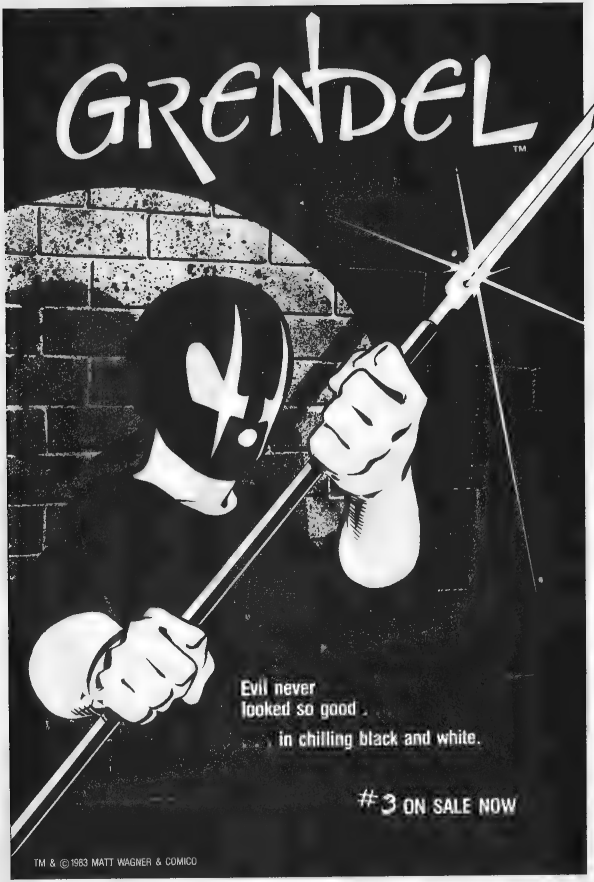
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CHRISTY MARX

"Writing comics was a dream of mine."

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BILL: *Any other projects you're planning to do in the future?*

CHRISTY: At the moment, I hardly have time to turn around. I have screenplays that I have to get to, and another project in the comic-book field that I'd like to do someday, but I haven't found the right artist for it yet.

BILL: *Could you give us a general idea what it's about?*

CHRISTY: It's so good, I don't want to give anything away yet. *(Laughter.)* The title itself is significant, so it's difficult to talk about. There is one other project, with Eclipse, that may or may not happen at this point. They're interested in doing a ZORRO book, but they don't have the artistic team put together. They would like me to write it, and the owner of ZORRO would like me to write it, so if it comes about, I probably will be writing it.

BILL: *Oh, boy — I sure would like to see that!*

CHRISTY: Yeah — me, too!

BILL: *You ever think of doing anything for the mainstream, again?*

CHRISTY: I don't think I would do work-for-hire at this point. I find it very difficult to get my creative joices going on something I don't own. I remember saying that to **Jim Shooter** back in 1980, and he didn't really like hearing it at the time, but that's how I felt then and I still feel pretty much the same way now.

BILL: *Do you have any reflections on being a woman, who is both a fan and writer, in a field that is so heavily male-oriented and male-dominated?*

CHRISTY: Yes, I am a woman. I was born female, and I have continued that way . . .

BILL: *Much to Peter's delight.*

CHRISTY: . . . yes, much to Peter's delight! I do remember when I started reading comics, and I was reading BATMAN, I would turn Robin into a girl. I would take my ballpoint pen and draw in long hair, little boobs and a skirt, and make him a girl. I guess it was my attempt to associate myself with the character and it was as close as I could get, without changing sex, myself. I started creating my own characters and before I was done I had come up with a hundred female characters, super-heroes and so forth, the very first of which, just by a coincidence, I called "Black Diamond," which has, as you know, now actually become the name of a comic-book character — much to my frustration. *(Laughter.)* I always thought I would eventually do something with that name.

Carlos McLlyr receives his father's talisman, the Black Rune.

But I'm very glad to see that there are a lot more women getting involved in comics. I think if you give female readers female characters, they'll read comics and enjoy them. I just get really pissed off at the roles that are forced on people at such an early age — like the toy companies that push the idea that something like the MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE playset is only for little boys, and if you're a little girl, you have to play with your toy kitchen set or toy cosmetic set. I grew up hating that garbage! I guess you'd call me a tomboy. I'm hoping that this sex-role stereotyping is going to change and break down in the future. And if I can do it by giving female readers a strong woman — like Boronwe — that they can identify with, and who'll make them think, then I'll be happy.

BILL: *Who knows? Maybe someday, right next to the MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE playset, there'll be a SISTERHOOD OF STEEL playset.*

CHRISTY: Let's not get insulting! *(Laughter.)*

Photo: Peter Ledger

"My career has been the result of a series of

STEVE LEIALOHA

When our Canadian correspondent, Marty Herzog, told us he was going to interview artist Steve Leialoha, we knew we could expect something unusual — the lanky Hawaiian penciller/inker/sometime-writer is an unusual guy, known for his off-the-wall sense of humor. What took place between Marty and Steve, in the Toronto studio of artist Ken Steacy, was even more unusual than we anticipated. Ken was gentleman enough to host the interview, provide Chinese food for the participants, and even let Steve talk occasionally — which he did, quite capably and humorously, covering his work on COYOTE, STAR WARS and WARLOCK, his days hanging around movie sets with George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola, the eternal struggle of Money versus Art, and the role that Amazing But True Coincidences have played in his career.

Ken had a few words on these subjects, too . . .

KEN STEACY: *Say something in Hawaiian, Steve.*

STEVE LEIALOHA: *Aloha.*

KEN: *Thank you. I'll say something in Canadian. "How's it goin', eh? Take off, eh?" Marty, say something in American.*

MARTY HERZOG: *Baseball.* (Laughter.)

KEN: *All right — we're ready to start interviewing. Who's interviewing here?*

MARTY: *I am. And Dave requires that I start out asking some Vital Statistics.*

KEN: *Okay. How big is it, Steve?* (Laughter.)

MARTY: *Not that vital!*

KEN: *Oh, sorry.*

MARTY: *Steve, what's your favorite color?*

STEVE: I don't have one. It all depends upon the circumstances.

KEN: *Oh, what a wimp! You see the sign on the door that says, "No wimps"?*

MARTY: *Steacy, these are not your vital statistics.*

KEN (petulantly): *I want to be interviewed!*

MARTY: *Don't worry. You will be, you will be.*

STEVE: What's your favorite color, Ken?

KEN: *I won't tell you, 'cause your interview is before mine!*

MARTY: *Steve, what has been the biggest influence on your life?*

STEVE: Getting drafted. That's why I'm here in Canada. *(Laughter.)* Getting drafted and the Beatles.

MARTY: *Okay. Okay . . . now we're going to get down to real business. I hope Dave is happy. Are you happy, Dave?*

KEN: *We're happy, Dave!*

MARTY: *My first question is: How's it feel to be Hawaiian?*

STEVE: Fine. That way I can go to Hawaii, and stay in places where you don't see tourists . . .

MARTY: *Ah-hah.*

STEVE: . . . and smoke lots of dope. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *What was your first —*

KEN: *Sexual perversion.*

MARTY: *Profes — Ken, cut it out!*

KEN: *We swore we wouldn't talk about comics during this interview.*

MARTY: *Did we? Did we swear that?*

KEN: *We want to talk about art and sex.*

MARTY: *Why did you swear you wouldn't talk about comics?*

STEVE: We'd like to skip over it quickly, and get on to more important things.

KEN: *See, Marty, everyone reading this knows the comics. They've already heard, "What kind of brush do you use?"*

MARTY: *Steve, did I ask you what kind of brush you use?*

KEN: *No, you didn't. But your next question was going to be, "What was it like doing COYOTE?" or "Did you enjoy working with Chris Claremont?" All the stuff that you hear all the time. What we want people to realize is that there's a lot more depth to us professionals.*

MARTY: *Ken not only inks your work, he also speaks your mind, doesn't he?*

STEVE: That's right. Go ahead, boss.

KEN: *Thank you. There's a lot more to us than pencilling and inking and lettering.*

MARTY: *"Us"?*

KEN: *We're sensitive, we're —*

MARTY: *Geeks, right. Steve, do you want to elaborate on what he just said?*

STEVE: No.

KEN: *It would be difficult. I sort of covered all the ground that needs to be covered.*

chance encounters — amazing coincidences."

Art: Joan Thornborrow

"I got to work on STAR WARS

STEVE: I think he covered it pretty well.

MARTY: *Ken, you were invited here because —*

STEVE: Because it's his house.

KEN: *That's right. I'm putting this sucker up.*

MARTY: *Well, besides the fact that it is your house, and you're buying the Chinese food —*

STEVE: Let's just get on to the interesting stuff.

MARTY: *Do you really expect interesting questions from me?*

KEN: *No. That's why* I'm *here.*

MARTY: *What I was getting at, Steve, before Ken hijacked the interview, was: How did you first get your foot in the door to do your first professional book?*

STEVE: That was from being at the San L'ego Comics Convention in 1971. Which was my first convention, and where I met **Mark Evanier** and **Dave Kraft** —

MARTY: *Who?*

STEVE: Dave Kraft. He's a short little guy.

KEN: *Yeah, he's getting bald now. He used to be really cool. He used to wear a pork-pie hat a lot.*

STEVE: So I got to know Mark and he asked me, "Do you want to do a comic?" And I did, in 1972, for **Denis Kitchen's** HIGH ADVENTURE, with Mark writing.

MARTY: *Right. Mark Evanier walked up to a total stranger and said, "Do you want to do a comic?"*

STEVE: Actually, I had started working in the art show, and I met all kinds of people, young fans like **Bil Stout, John Pound, Jack Kirby** *(Laughter).* Anyway, Mark saw my stuff there and apparently liked it. My career has been the result of a series of chance encounters.

KEN: *He was the victim of a series of accidents.*

STEVE: I met **Dave Kraft** through a series of accidents, through the course of this three days of the convention. I would walk past this guy, like every twenty minutes. Finally, after three days of walking by this guy, we just sort of stopped, and introduced each other, and it's been like that ever since.

MARTY: *You're continuing to walk by him.* (Laughter.)

STEVE: Yes — no, like last August, I was in Woodstock, NY, the only time I've ever been there, sitting there in this coffee shop, and who should be at the next table but **Dave Kraft.** I hadn't seen him in years.

MARTY: *What were you doing in Woodstock, NY?*

KEN (spaced-out, nasal, hippy-doper voice): *Three days, man, three days.* (Laughter.)

STEVE: Just visiting friends — and it's the only time I've ever been there. And I just happened to be at the right place and ran into Dave, and **Jim Salicrup** was there, too. Amazing coincidence. The whole thing was by chance. And that's how I got started on WARLOCK. I went to a convention in Berkeley, in 1974, and **Jim Starlin** said, "You want to ink WARLOCK?" And I said, "Okay."

MARTY: *You make it sound so simple.*

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Above and below: Darth Vader and Obi-Wan, depicted by Chaykin and Leialoha for STAR WARS #4.

THEN, HIS BODY LOCKED WITH VADER'S, BEN BEGINS BACKING INTO THE MASSIVE STARSHIP HANGAR.
THEIR LIGHT-SABERS LOCKED IN MID-AIR, THE TWO POWERFUL WARRIORS STAND MOTIONLESS...
...LIKE TITANS OUT OF SOME LOST TIME!

© 1977 Twentieth Century Fox

because I knew who George Lucas was."

© 1975 MCG
...ZERO
AN EMERALD RAY LASHES OUT, AND EVEN THOUGH IT CAUSES NO PAIN, A BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAM OF ANGUISH SPRINGS FROM THE SOUL OF ADAM WARLOCK!
NYEEEARGH!
FOR, HE KNOWS THAT NOTHING WILL EVER BE AS LIGHT, CAREFREE, OR HAPPY AS THOSE DAYS PAST. NOW LOST FOREVER!

Leialoha inking Jim Starlin. From WARLOCK #9.

KEN: *It is. That's why we don't want to talk about this stuff!* (Laughter.)

STEVE: *Shhh!*

MARTY: *You were supposed to say that you were a struggling artist, that you starved . . .*

STEVE: Noooo . . .

KEN: *Nah, it's a myth.*

STEVE: You see, the thing is you have to be able to draw well enough to take advantage of these situations. By the time I met **Starlin** I was 23 and I'd been drawing for 22 years

KEN: *You were a late starter.*

STEVE: Yes, I couldn't hold a pencil 'til I was 1 year old. But it's, like, you always run into opportunities, and it's just whether or not you can take advantage of them or not.

MARTY: *Did you make your opportunities, or did they happen to you?*

KEN: *Like, did you go to these conventions with a career purpose in mind?*

STEVE: No, no. I just wanted to meet real comic professionals.

MARTY: *Why?*

STEVE: 'Cause I'd never seen one. Well, I was always a comics fan, and always drawing comics, and I thought, maybe I'd like to do this. But I'd never seriously thought about becoming a professional, 'cause I'd always heard that you had to be in New York to become a comics professional. But I still wanted to meet people who were doing comics. **Jack Kirby** was supposed to be there so I went down there. He was there, he had a lot of great stuff, and it was all very inspiring. And over the years I've met a lot of people at these conventions —

KEN: *Like me!*

STEVE: We didn't meet at a convention.

KEN: *True. We met at Trina Robbins' house.*

STEVE: No, we met at this wild party in San Francisco. *(Laughter.)*

KEN: *Oh, that's right. Well, that's a story we can't tell here. This is a family magazine.*

MARTY: *Oh, that gay —*

KEN: *That's the one! Go get the food, Steve. I'll keep talking for Steve.*

MARTY: *No, please don't.*

KEN: *Okay, how I meant Ken Steacy —*

MARTY: *No, seriously, we don't want to hear about how you two met.*

STEVE: It was a great party, though.

KEN: *I especially liked the waiter, and the tin foil sculpture on the wall. But that's another story —*

MARTY: *That's another story, and we won't go into it here. Okay — we were talking about how Steve Leialoha broke into the big leagues—*

KEN: *— and was arrested.* (Laughter.) *And had do do time with Marvel.*

STEVE: It was a series of flukes — fortunate coincidences — that things just worked out. **Jim Starlin** needed an inker for WARLOCK, and I was the only one in the San Francisco area. **Starlin** was living in Oakland, and he wanted some one near-by so he could do all of WARLOCK on the West Coast and send back the finished product to the East. **Starlin** said, "Can you ink?" And I said, "Sure." And I went home and got a pen and sat home trying to figure out how to ink, and I inked issue #9 of WARLOCK.

MARTY: *Now, seriously, though, that was the first time you ever inked someone else's pencils?*

STEVE: Yeah. Although I must admit that I had help in the fact that **Starlin's**

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"I find similarities between me and my fans."

pencils were extremely tight. All I had to do was trace it off, be neat, and I would add little bits and pieces here and there. Also at the time, **Marv Wolfman** was the editor-in-chief at Marvel, and I had done some fanzines for him about seven years earlier, back in 1967, when I was still in high school. He had no idea of what I had done since that, but he thought I was worth giving a try for at least one issue to see if I was any good. And it just worked out.

While I was living in the San Francisco area, **Frank Brunner**, who was and still is living in Oakland, wanted an inker for HOWARD THE DUCK. So I got that. I started with #1. So it worked out really nice, starting out inking a "fan fave" of the time — WARLOCK, then HOWARD THE DUCK #1. I stayed on that 'til I got off HOWARD to work on STAR WARS, which I got on to because I knew who **George Lucas** was.

MARTY: *Because you knew George Lucas, you were able to do the STAR WARS comic book?*

STEVE: Well, no. I knew who **George Lucas was** — see, this is another example of Taking Advantage of the Situation — and I figured if he's going to be doing a science-fiction movie, it's probably going to be pretty interesting, and I'd like to work on the comic. And so when I was just standing in Continuity Studios, **Neal Adams'** place, waiting for the elevator with **Howard Chaykin,** who was going to draw the Star Wars comic, I said, "Do you need an inker?" And he said, "Sure."

MARTY: *This was in New York?*

STEVE: Yes, around Thanksgiving of 1976. You see, **George Lucas** has been filming in San Francisco since about 1971 or '72. I had friends who worked out at Zoetrope, **Francis Ford Coppola's** outfit, as assistant go-fers and what-not. So we used to go down and hang out at Zoetrope, where George was shooting his first film, THX 1138. Francis was the Executive Producer, I believe, something like that on THX 1138. We would watch them filming, and look through camera-lenses when they weren't looking. It was a very informal atmosphere.

MARTY: *It must have been. Can you imagine somebody saying, "We're just hanging around the STAR WARS set?"* (Laughter.)

STEVE: Right. We'd be standing there, and Francis would walk by. I remember him introducing me to his family — he introduced me all around. It was really amusing. **Mario Puzo** was there. I remember **Arthur C. Clarke** going through there one time.

MARTY: *Where did you get the gall — or the nerve — to walk into this studio?*

STEVE: Well, it was no big deal back then. Who was **George Lucas** in 1972? He was, I guess, in retrospect, 27 years old, a kid right out of college or something, whatever. I don't know the specifics of George's life.

KEN: *He'll let you know when he sees this interview.* (Laughter.)

STEVE: I showed **Lucas** my work at that time and said, "Let me do your poster, let me do your poster."

MARTY: "Please *let me do your poster!*" (Laughter.)

STEVE: In retrospect it was really awful stuff that I showed him. I'm not surprised that he wasn't the least bit interested.

MARTY: *Yes, but how very ironic that unbeknownst to you at the time, a few years later, you would be illustrating one of his films.*

STEVE: In retrospect, the book didn't come out that hot, because it was really a rush job. But that's another aspect of this business. A lot of times you really don't have the time to do anything.

MARTY: *Was it the fact that you were one of the few West Coast artists at the time — did that have any influence on you getting to do STAR WARS?*

STEVE: I don't think so.

MARTY: *Did the fact that you were there in San Francisco, and had semi-direct contact with Lucas, have any*

Howard meets Beverly, in the classic HOWARD THE DUCK #1 — written by Steve Gerber, pencilled by Frank Brunner, inked by Steve Leialoha.

I'M ENTITLED TO A SMOKE BEFORE I DIE.
SHOULD'A KNOWN EVEN BIZARRE COULDN'T BE SIMPLE ON THIS WORL--
HELP!
HUH--?!
SPINNING ON HIS TAIL, FEATHERS, HOWARD PEERS IN THE WINDOW TO SEE:
Y-YOU'RE A DUCK!
YEAH. I KNOW. YOU HAIRLESS APES KEEP REMINDING ME.
WHAT'S WITH THE CHAINS, SWEETHEART?
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"Starlin said, 'Can you ink?' I said, 'Sure.' And

influence on you getting to do the book.

STEVE: No. Had nothing to do with it whatsoever. But there were a lot of fringe benefits. Like, I wanted lots of stills from it — I just wanted to get all the stuff I could before the film came out. I called the Stills Department of Twentieth Century Fox and asked them if I could have some stills. And it just so happened that the guy who was in charge of the Marvel Comics project, **Charlie Lippincott,** was there at the Twentieth Century Fox Still Department. So I hooked right into the right person, right off the bat, first call. "Think positive and things will work out" — that's always been my approach. And so I went down to L.A. and got a bunch of references from the **Lucas** people. They were really nice about it and let me pick out stuff that I wanted. I got a few stills that were never released. I think I got the only picture of **Carrie Fisher** smiling. *(Laughter.)* Met **Harrison Ford** — he was just hanging around the office. I showed him the pages.

MARTY: *What did he have to say about the book?*

STEVE: I think it was probably interesting to him to see his face caricatured in a comic-book. And then there was a rough-cut screening of STAR WARS and I got invited to that. It was me and **Roy Thomas** and **Tom Orzechowski,** who was lettering the book . . .

MARTY: *Right. The letterer has to see the film.* (Laughter.) *He has to know how they talk.*

STEVE: We saw it four months before it came out in the theaters. It was only half done — there were no special effects. All of the fight sequences were videotaped World War II movies with a lot of Stukas and Dive-Bombers, instead of TIE-fighters. None of the explosions had been put in. A lot of it was black and white. None of the music had been put in. Many big-wigs of the movie industry were there, like **Philip Kaufman,** who did INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS.

MARTY: *So what was the reaction, four months before it was released? How did people react to the film at that time?*

STEVE: Well, my reaction was that I didn't care that much for the acting, and figured maybe they'd break even — which was the attitude of, I think, even **Lucas.**

MARTY: *Who was it at Marvel who had the foresight to buy the book?*

STEVE: I think **George Lucas** has been a comic fan and I think 20th Century Fox was well aware of the publicity value of having a comic book version of its movie coming out before the film.

MARTY: *You mean, you think that Lucas or Fox went to Marvel with the idea.*

STEVE: Yeah. Marvel hadn't done any movie adaptations at that time, and I believe they went to **Roy Thomas** and Roy got together with **George Lucas,** or something like that, and Roy convinced Marvel that it would be a real smart idea to do this film. And that's how Marvel ended up doing STAR WARS.

MARTY: *You've done undergrounds. Did the undergrounds influence you at all?*

STEVE: I would say very little. I was really a Marvel Comics fan when I was a little kid. I liked all the basic stuff. I started buying comics about 1960, when I was 8 years old. I liked ADAM STRANGE, GREEN LANTERN, mostly the stuff that's done by **Carmine Infantino** and **Gil Kane,** inked by **Murphy Anderson.** And later I liked the stuff **Jack Kirby** and **Steve Ditko** were doing. Basically I liked the mainstream stuff, and when I saw the underground comix I was interested in the sex and violence but didn't particularly like the drawing. I think I was too young to really relate to it. It was only 'til years later that I began to appreciate it. And most of it I really didn't like. But there were a few that I liked — **Rick Griffin** and **Gilbert Shelton.**

From SPIDER-WOMAN #41 — pencils by Steve, inks by Wiacek, words by Claremont.

© 1981 MCG

I sat home trying to figure out how to ink."

© 1981 MCG

This page: X-Men a la Leialoha, from SPIDER-WOMAN #38, with Wiacek & Co. inks

MARTY: *Were there any artists that you were trying to emulate when you were an artist-in-training?*

STEVE: Not intentionally so, but when I was younger I was really influenced by **Gil Kane** and **Frazetta** and all the standard influences. The "fan faves."

MARTY: *But you were not influenced by the undergrounds.*

STEVE: Well, I was not influenced on an artistic level, at that time. From a psychological point of view, I was very interested in the undergrounds. Also, all of the stuff in the undergrounds was owned by the people who did them. But that really didn't concern me until I started working for Marvel Comics.

MARTY: *When did you start creating things?*

STEVE: Well, actually, immediately after I started working for Marvel Comics I also started working for **Mike Friedrich**, who was — I don't know if his STAR-REACH was *the* first alternative comic — at least the first guy to use professionals from the mainstream comics in a non-mainstream comic. With the exception of **Wally Wood**, of course, who did it in 1964.

KEN: *He was an artist.*

MARTY: *Thank you, Ken. You can go back to sleep now.*

STEVE: At the same time I started doing work-for-hire stuff for Marvel Comics, I was also doing my own stuff for **Mike Friedrich**, and retaining the copyright. I did a few short stories, and then did funny animal comics for QUACK, which I intend to continue doing. As soon as I find the time I'm going to be doing another funny animal story for **Archie Goodwin** in EPIC.

KEN: *How do you rationalize doing work-for-hire?*

STEVE: I rationalize doing work-for-hire by only being an inker.

KEN: *I only ask that question in light of also doing work on which you own the copyright.*

STEVE: To me the difference is the creative output. I never wanted to write for Marvel — or any other publisher — unless I could own what I was writing. I didn't want to come up with ideas that are commercially viable and not be able to get a percentage of it. I know the potential that these projects have. Because I'm relatively familiar with what goes on in the movie industry, I know how easy it can be to get things rolling in that direction and — the whims of Fate once again — you never know what's going to be picked up and turned into a film. So the potential for profit is quite good, if you've got good ideas. I never do anything but ink for Marvel. Well, I have done pencilling for them, but I really did it because I needed to learn how to draw much better than I did. There was a point where I had inked almost every body in the business and was no longer learning anything by inking, and decided that I would start drawing.

KEN: *But effectively you still weren't creating?*

STEVE: Right, I still wasn't coming up with the ideas or anything. I was trying to depict them in interesting ways, and I suppose that could be called creative.

MARTY: *Mike Friedrich gave you freedom to create, and you did create, and you now own the product, but unfortunately Mike Friedrich and Star-Reach did not give you the distribution or the exposure that they could can.*

STEVE: Well, I don't know if the exposure was really that important at that time.

MARTY: *What was important?*

STEVE: Just to be able to do them and have the experience of writing and doing my own stuff. The first rabbit story that I did, **Sergio Aragones** was nice enough to volunteer to write for me. That was a great help to me because I didn't know anything about writing comics. That sort of got the whole ball rolling. There was no other place where I could do something of that nature. Like for example the first story I did for STAR-REACH was sort of a science-fiction story. One day I got a letter from **Ray Bradbury** telling me that he liked the story and to keep up the good work. It was incredibly encouraging to me. To get a letter, at age 24, from someone of that stature.

MARTY: *You get a lot of ego out of it but not a lot of money.*

LIKE STORM, WARREN'S CODE-NAME RELATED TO HIS POWERS. HE WAS THE ANGEL, AND HE HAD THE WINGS TO PROVE IT.
I RE-CALIBRATED OUR MINI-CEREBRO COMPUTER TO TRACK TOM AND JUGGY'S ENERGY PATTERNS.
IT SAYS THEY'RE IN THE SHIP BELOW.

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"I had to cut a lot of corners in COYOTE."

© 1983 Steve Englehart

KEN: *Wait a minute, Marty. You also get a great deal of satisfaction out of it.*

MARTY: *Ken, is your wife getting much satisfaction?* (Laughter.)

KEN: What?! *I beg your* — Shut up! Strike that!

STEVE and KEN (singing): "Can't get no satisfaction . .."

STEVE: No, you have to remember at the time, while I was doing that stuff for **Friedrich**, I was also still an inker for Marvel Comics.

MARTY: *So as a hobby you were doing work for Mike Friedrich.*

STEVE: Exactly.

KEN: *Oh, come on, it was more than a hobby.*

STEVE: Well, in terms of being paid for it, it was a hobby. Mike paid pretty well, but it took me a lot longer to do stuff for him that I considered really good. Like, I did a story, a rabbit story, for ECLIPSE, which pays comparable rates, but since I wanted to be good, it took me three times as long as for what I considered work-for-hire jobs.

KEN: *Marty, what you have to understand is the need of the creative individual to express himself. And this may sound dreadfully naive —*

MARTY: *It sounds dreadfully naive.*

KEN: *However, it does transcend . . .*

STEVE: Mere money.

MARTY: *OK, look at somebody like Dan O'Neill who was considered by many, one of the first of the underground artists. He had his first mass exposure through the SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, but he did not have his freedom. So he rejected the exposure, achieved his freedom — and starved.*

STEVE: Actually, **Dan O'Neill** now is doing a strip for the CHRONICLE once again. He does a weekly strip which is real good. Dan's a nice guy. An Irish curmudgeon. He had a whole series about the Irish Navy — three guys in a washtub — greeting Queen Elizabeth when she visited San Francisco. Good stuff.

KEN: *We're getting off the beam, boys. Beam back down.* (Laughter.)

MARTY: *Okay, getting back to Steve, you had the opportunity to go to something like Epic Comics, which is an amalgamation of. . .*

STEVE: The best parts of Marvel Comics and the best part of the alternative publishers.

MARTY: *You said it better than I could.*

STEVE: Which is to say, you get to own the character and the copyrights, and Marvel pays you a lot.

KEN: *And handles the distribution.*

STEVE: And handles the distribution.

WERE-ANIMAL -- COME ME HERE TO--?
IF I'M A WERE-ANIMAL, WHY ARE WE TALKING, INSTEAD OF DREAMING?
I DON'T KNOW...
HARD TO KNOW THINGS, OTHER PEOPLE'S DRUGS IN YOUR BRAIN-- eh, BOY?
BUDDI THOUGHT I COULD DEAL---
-? !-
I'M IN HIS BODY NOW

Leialoha art from COYOTE #1.

KEN: *I just said that.* (Laughter.)

MARTY: *Which means a lot of satisfaction, because you got a lot of exposure and*

KEN: *How much satisfaction do you get out of comics, Steve?*

STEVE: Quite a bit, let me tell you.

KEN: *How much? On a scale of 1 to 10.*

STEVE: I would say an 8.

KEN: *Oh, come on!*

STEVE: In terms of doing the artwork.

MARTY: *Okay. COYOTE was a much-anticipated project for the Epic line. Who actually owns the character, Coyote?*

STEVE: **Steve Engelhart** created Coyote and he owns the character. It was first run in ECLIPSE and **Marshall Rogers** did the artwork, and Marshall preferred working for ECLIPSE.

MARTY: *Steve Engelhart has the option of hiring the artist for his creation?*

STEVE: Right. And he asked me if I wanted to do it.

MARTY: *Were you being hired or did you again share a creation?*

STEVE: Well, we shared in a percentage of the profits of the book, although Steve maintained ownership of the character, because he created the original concept.

KEN: *However, your vision of Coyote was different — radically different — from Marshall Rogers' vision —*

STEVE: Right. So I kept a copyright on the artwork.

MARTY: *Okay, so you had an opportunity, to enjoy in the creation of a character, and yet you elect to drop out.*

STEVE: Well, it turned out that it was taking me far longer to do the book than was possible. For example, the first issue took me three months to do, and it's a bi-monthly book. I did finish the second book in two months, but it was wearing me down. I was working the whole time, full time, with very little time off, and I felt that the returns were not sufficient to kill myself over.

MARTY: *So you had to decide on one hand, "Well, I'm spending too much time on a book that I'm getting a lot of satisfaction out of, but not getting enough of the green stuff for doing." Is that correct?*

STEVE: That did enter into it.

MARTY: *I think it may have had a lot to do with it.*

KEN: *What is this, TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES?*

"You always run into opportunities, but you

MARTY: *Let's face it, Ken, a lot of us don't want to be struggling young artists.*

KEN: *That has nothing to do with it.*

STEVE: Keep quiet, Ken. We'll get around to it.

KEN: *Okay.*

MARTY: *Your SPIDER-WOMAN books, Steve — how long did it take you to produce one of those?*

STEVE: Two weeks.

MARTY: *Two weeks?*

KEN: *You see, the difference —*

STEVE: *Sh-sh.' (Laughter.)* I did one issue in two weeks, I did another issue in three weeks.

MARTY: *Why? You weren't that concerned with these books?*

STEVE: No, but —

KEN: *Ahh, now we're getting controversial.*

STEVE: For one thing, I think the difference is that regular work-for-hire books are one-shots. They have to be good enough to get people interested in it enough to read it, and not much afterward. But with COYOTE, I wanted something that was good enough to reprint as a book, that could hold its own against, say, the European books. But the schedule **Steve Engelhart** wanted it by was more than I could keep up and still do a decent piece of work. As it was I had to cut a lot of corners in the first two issues anyway. I mean, I would much rather have spent working four months on the first book rather than the three months I took getting it out. I'm still not completely satisfied with those books in that respect. It doesn't matter to me now whether those books get reprinted or not. People seem to like them — I hope they do — but at the same time I don't expect them to do a whole lot for me.

MARTY: *Okay, where are you going to go from here?*

STEVE: I'm going to do more work-for-hire comics.

MARTY: *That's what I mean. You're going for the green stuff.*

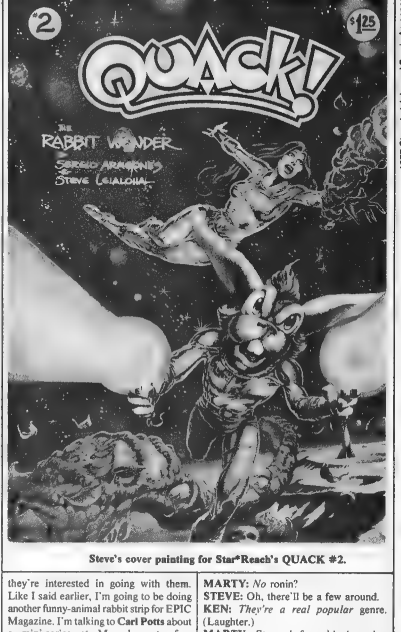
STEVE: What I'm doing is a fill-in issue of DOCTOR STRANGE. I have nothing against doing work-for-hire, as long as I have the option of doing stuff that is not work-for-hire. It's not having that choice that I don't like. But we now have that choice. So I don't mind doing work-for-hire. It's not something I intend to regularly anyway, but I don't mind doing it. I have a lot of projects in mind, projects that would sound nebulous to you and that I don't want to discuss — things that I've written and that I think are pretty good. I'm going to be presenting them to Marvel and see if they're interested in going with them. Like I said earlier, I'm going to be doing another funny-animal rabbit strip for EPIC Magazine. I'm talking to **Carl Potts** about a mini-series at Marvel, sort of a participatory thing, where we split the profits. Marvel would own it and I'd get a percentage of it as one of the creators.

MARTY: *What kind of book is it?*

STEVE: It'll be a *samurai* story Carl wants to do — an authentic *samurai* story set somewhere in the 1600s or 1700s. We haven't really worked out any of the details at this point. Carl gave me a rough plot and it sounded interesting.

KEN (whispering): *It's going to be about a* ronin.

STEVE: No. it's not.



© 1977 Steve Leialoha and Sergio Aragones

Steve's cover painting for Star*Reach's QUACK #2.

MARTY: *No* ronin?

STEVE: Oh, there'll be a few around.

KEN: *They're a real popular* genre. (Laughter.)

MARTY: *Steve, before this interview ends, can't you say something deeply profound and philosophical?*

STEVE: Okay — the other project is going to be Joycean Comics.

KEN: *Classics Illustrated Presents Steve Leialoha's FINNEGAN'S WAKE.*

STEVE: Thirty pages.

KEN: *With Jack Kirby illustrating.* (Laughter.)

STEVE: It would be a comic you could read backwards and forwards and you can't tell the difference.

MARTY: *If you could do any book —*

have to be able to take advantage of them."

anything that you wanted to do — and have it published in any medium that you pick, what would it be?

STEVE: Well, it would be this concept I've been coming up with myself, but I still toy on the side with doing comics that aren't necessarily mainstream.

KEN: *That's very ballsy, Steve.*

STEVE: I beg your pardon!

KEN: *Toying with concept of doing comics that aren't mainstream.*

STEVE: All right, then, I'd like to do THE CAGE, by **Martin Vaughn James,** which is not going to sell to your average Marvel Comics reader. It's fun to expand the intellectual boundries of what can be done with comics. See, with Marvel Comics you have to stick to straight narrative, and the less demanding of the reader the better.

KEN: *Which is by no means a disparaging remark. I don't want people to make that mistake.*

STEVE: Right, they shouldn't.

KEN: *And people often misunderstand that, because they don't really identify who Marvel's heavy-user audience is. The age is much lower than most people assume.*

STEVE: See, if you do a job for Marvel Comics, you have to know that the 8-14 age group is your audience. To throw in something from out of left field would be unprofessional — it would be irresponsible. So to me another factor of doing alternative comics is an alternative to the mainstream narrative-comics audience.

KEN: *A difference audience.*

MARTY: *Steve, if you're doing alternative comics, are you creating for yourself, or are you creating for an audience? Ken has just said he's aiming at a very young audience.*

KEN: *Only when I'm working for Marvel. A good artist is one who knows his audience, who knows how to talk to them.*

STEVE: At the same time, part of the fun, for me, is in coming up with things that I find really intriguing — and then trying to find out just who the audience is. It's been real fascinating for me to find fans who follow the kind of work I do, and there's a lot of similarities between them and me.

KEN: *Yeah, they have acne, and they're sort of* gauche. (Laughter.)

MARTY: *But Ken just said you have to write down to your audience —*

KEN: *I didn't say that, Marty!*

MARTY: *You certainly seemed to imply it.*

KEN: *No, I didn't in the slightest, and that's something you are projecting on to me, and a lot of people do that. I don't think Maurice Sendak is talking down to his audience when he's writing children's books. I think he knows his audience, he's gotten inside their heads, knows how to speak to that audience, and he does it effectively. And I think that any responsible artist who is interested in communicating with his audience has to do that. And that kind of derogatory connotation that you just mentioned — well, that's your own projection, your perception. A lot of people in the industry do talk down to their audience, and I think that's very wrong.*

MARTY: *Steve, if you're creating — who's your audience?*

STEVE: Well, when I do stuff for Marvel Comics, I try to keep up with what the general Marvel Comics audience is interested in. But at the same time I try to get into the frame of mind of what I used to like when I was that age, and then I try to do comics the way I woud have liked, or still like, and try to come up with something interesting on that level. But keeping it a relatively straight graphic narrative — not making it so complicated and so intellectual that the kids are not going to be able to follow it. That's one of the major differences between **Jean Giraud's** work and **Moebius'** work — in that LT. BLUEBERRY is done very straight, nothing fancy, just expertly drawn, whereas **Moebius** is about as intellectual as you can get, doing basically what ever comes to mind. There's a man who, within his own self, has been able to effectively turn out two different styles of work, depending on who his audience is, I think as **Moebius,** his audience is himself, whereas when he's working as **Jean Giraud,** his audience is the fans of the western *genre.* Which has made it the most successful western strip in Europe. *(Charles Boyer-like French accent:)* It has made him a wealthy man.

KEN: *That's what we aspire to!* (Laughter.)

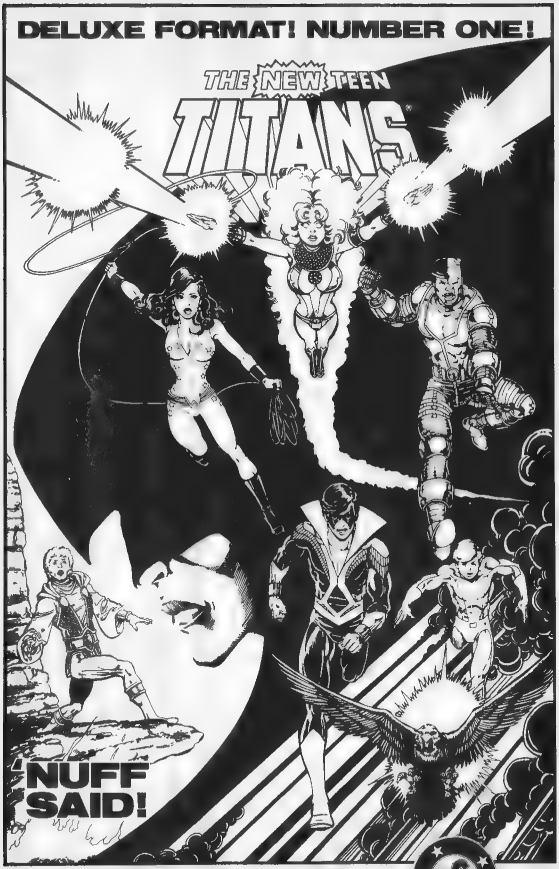
MARTY: *I think we're going to end on that.*

KEN: *But it just started getting interesting! Can't we —*

Spidey meets Howard in HOWARD THE DUCK #1.

HANDS GIFTED WITH THE PROPORTIONATE STRENGTH OF A SPIDER NAIL THE ARRIED HOWARD TO SORRETY.
AND SO COMES TO PASS PERHAPS THE WEIRDEST MOMENT IN THIS, THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS, AS...
WEB-FOOT MEETS WEB-HEAD!!
YOU'RE FOR REAL! JAMES ON DIDN'T CRACK HIS NUT! YOU'RE A TALKING DUCK!!
YOU'RE NOT EXACTLY ME NORMAL, EITHER, Y' KNOW.

© 1975 MCG



FROM THE NEW DC COMICS.
THERE'S NO STOPPING US NOW!

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"It's a thrill to be coloring SUPERMAN — *the* hero in our business."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Anthony Tollin

Occupation: Colorist

Born: 20 February 1952 — St. Paul, Minnesota

Residence: Fairfield, NJ

Training: Learned coloring from Jack Adler and Sol Harrison of DC.

Credits: OMEGA MEN, G.I. COMBAT, GREEN LANTERN, SUPERMAN, ACTION COMICS, INFINITY, INC., etc.

Hobbies and Interests: Old-time radio (especially THE SHADOW) and vintage newspaper strips (TERRY AND THE PIRATES, GASOLINE ALLEY, THIMBLE THEATRE, etc.).

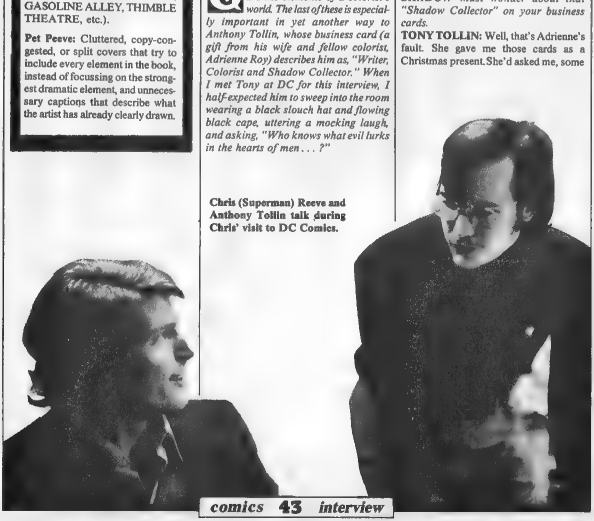
Pet Peeve: Cluttered, copy-congested, or split covers that try to include every element in the book, instead of focussing on the strongest dramatic element, and unnecessary captions that describe what the artist has already clearly drawn.

ANTHONY TOLLIN

Color, light and shadow — these are the elements of a colorist's world. The last of these is especially important in yet another way to Anthony Tollin, whose business card (a gift from his wife and fellow colorist, Adrienne Roy) describes him as, "Writer, Colorist and Shadow Collector." When I met Tony at DC for this interview, I half-expected him to sweep into the room wearing a black slouch hat and flowing black cape, uttering a mocking laugh, and asking, "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men . . . ?"

DAK: *People who aren't aware of THE SHADOW must wonder about that "Shadow Collector" on your business cards.*

TONY TOLLIN: Well, that's Adrienne's fault. She gave me those cards as a Christmas present. She'd asked me, some



Chris (Superman) Reeve and Anthony Tollin talk during Chris' visit to DC Comics.

"A colorist can really sabotage the

months before, what I wanted on the cards. "Archivist and Radio Historian," I told her. When the cards were printed, they said "Shadow Collector." I'm interested in pulp fiction and old-time radio drama. It's kind of interesting because I work in comic books, which is a medium of telling adventure stories with pictures, but no sound. And for a hobby I listen to a storytelling medium which is sound with no pictures. They go very well together. I love to listen to old radio tapes while I'm coloring.

DAK: *Well, what about the "Writer" part of the card?*

TONY: I was contributing editor and wrote five chapters of THE SHADOW SCRAPBOOK, and I'm now working on a follow-up book on THE SHADOW radio show. I interviewed about thirty people affiliated with its production from the Thirties to the Fifties. It's kind of therapy after a day of coloring, you know, to research and write. I find researching radio a tremendous challenge because the shows went out over the air and disappeared, frequently. Last weekend at the Old Time Radio Convention I organized a re-enactment of a SHADOW broadcast with many of the actors re-creating their original roles. A lot of them are still working, doing voice-overs, television commercials, and acting in films, on a regular basis. These people are still active and that's one of the reasons they're still alive. They've been working in a business — and I think comics are much the same way — where you aren't automatically folded at age 65. In creative areas, creative fields of endeavor, you can generally work as long as you keep producing.

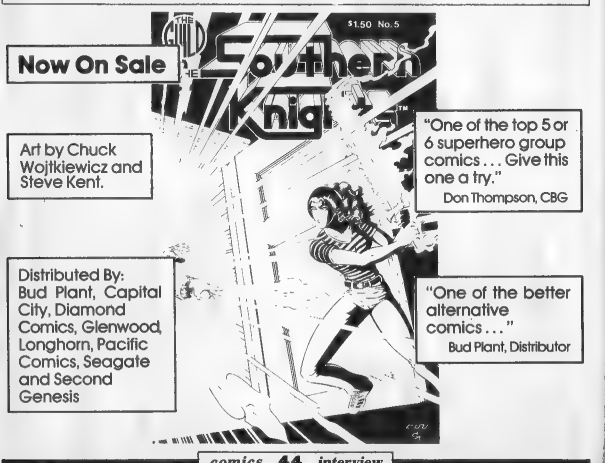
DAK: *In a sense, the super-heroes you're coloring today are continuing the tradition of Thirties' pulp and radio heroes like The Shadow.*

TONY: Batman is just an updated Shadow, really — wealthy young man about town who dons a dark attire to fight crime by night. I enjoy him tremendously even though I don't color BATMAN.

DAK: *What about characters you do color?*

TONY: It's a thrill for me to be coloring Superman because Superman is *the* hero in our business. All the other super-heroes derive from him. SPIDER-MAN was really an updating of the concepts that made SUPERMAN work — in particular, the Clark Kent/Superman relationship, which DC had lost track of and did not get back until the movies came along and **Christopher Reeve** redefined the character and the concept. I think that in the early 1960s **Stan Lee** recognized what the appeal of Superman had been — the nebbish nobody liked who was actually the person everybody worshipped. The early Peter Parker wore glasses and looked thin. He was really just a young Clark Kent. Unfortunately, it took Marvel a far shorter time to lose track of what Peter Parker and Spider-Man was all about than it had taken DC to lose track of Clark Kent and Superman. Green Lantern was my favorite character when I was growing up — I have all the original art from GREEN LANTERN #1 — and I used to color his book a few years ago but I got tired of it when it went into the Outer Space kick and got rid of the supporting cast. Since **Dave Gibbons** and **Len Wein** took over GREEN LANTERN I've returned to it and am enjoying it again.

DAK: *So — as your remarks on GREEN LANTERN indicate — you were a fan of comics when you were a kid, correct?*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THE
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Knights
$1.50 No. 5
Art by Chuck Wojtkiewicz and Steve Kent.
"One of the top 5 or 6 superhero group comics . . . Give this one a try."
Don Thompson, CBG
Distributed By:
Bud Plant, Capital City, Diamond Comics, Glenwood, Longhorn, Pacific Comics, Seagate and Second Genesis
"One of the better alternative comics . . . "
Bud Plant, Distributor

storytelling of the writer and artist."

Art: Dave Warren © 1990 Nostalgia Warehouse, Inc.

TONY: Yes. My first comic convention was the 1972 July Con in New York City. That was my first trip to New York, and about nine months later I was in New York working in the business as an editorial assistant at Warren. I went to Marvel and worked there for five months, doing Zip-A-Tone work and cover paste-ups in the British Bullpen, but I didn't like the political climate at Marvel of that time, so I went to DC.

DAK: *Were you interested in coloring?*

TONY: Yes. I had done some color separations at Warren, and wanted to get into coloring at DC. I was hired as proofreader, replacing **Carl Gafford** when he became an assistant production manager. I was also a production artist for a brief period, too. Then when Carl moved to California I inherited his position as Assistant Production Manager and Color Coordinator. It was a lot of fun because I also inherited Carl's freelance work, and I needed the extra income because I had just gotten married, and I wanted to do more coloring, which I enjoyed.

DAK: *Had you studied coloring in school?*

TONY: No. I learned a lot about coloring here at DC from **Jack Adler** and **Sol Harrison.** Sol had literally put the staples in the first comic ever published, and Sol and Jack together had worked on ACTION COMICS #1. I loved working with them.

DAK: *What kind of things did you learn?*

TONY: Here at DC there is a strong emphasis on storytelling in the color. If the character goes from one room to another in the story, DC generally wants you to establish that in the colors — you leave one family of colors in one room (blues, for example) and go to another family (maybe yellows or oranges) in the next room. And in doing that, you can sometimes color yourself into a corner when you discover that the same rooms may be occupied later in the story by different characters whose costumes may not contrast well with the colors you'd chosen for the rooms earlier. This is a particular danger in books like JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA or LEGION OF SUPER HEROES. I think the most difficult thing, and the most important thing, in coloring — as in other areas of comics — is storytelling.

DAK: *I think perhaps people realize that with writing or artwork, but maybe not as much with coloring.*

TONY: If the colors are changing with the backgrounds of each sequence, you can really sabotage the storytelling of the writer and the artist. Sometimes you will get a story that is poorly told and the coloring can subtly help, here and there — emphasize a few changes in places or time of day and still have a nice-looking colorful book. Kids are attracted to comics because they're exciting and colorful. And I'm not talking about a Baxter comic where you've got to tone down the coloring or else it looks Day-Glo, but regular comic books where they're still on a pretty cheap regular newsprint, and where if you color too subtly or softly you can come up with a pretty dull-looking book. You also have to make sure that only the important things in a panel stand out. I've seen examples of competitors' comics where you have a hero colored in a fairly dull outfit and in the back of the room you'll have a bright red telephone or a bright red chair. *(Laughter.)*

Jack Adler was such a wonderful teacher when it came to coloring. Sometimes I would give him a book that some colorist had done and he'd turn the book upside down to look at it. Now that may seem like just a gag at first. But he was looking for things that stood out that shouldn't stand out. And that's frequently easier to see when you're just looking at the color, which you can do when the pages are upside down and you aren't distracted by what's happening. Good comic-book coloring should seldom draw attention to itself. I don't think a reader should be looking through a standard comic book and be saying, "Wow, what wild coloring!" That doesn't mean that the pages can't be beautiful. It doesn't mean that you can't go for effects. But they should blend in with the story. On a BATMAN story, you can go for moody effects. You put those same effects into a **Curt Swan** SUPERMAN story and it just wouldn't fit the art. So I try to change my coloring from one artist to another and make it flow with the story.

Tony as The Shadow on the cover of COLLECTOR'S CORNER #27.

LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES®

AN EPIC FOR OUR TIME FROM A TIME YET TO COME

DELUXE FORMAT. NUMBER ONE.

FROM THE NEW DC.
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"You can color yourself into a corner."

There's a scene in CITIZEN KANE — a black and white film, but it's an example — where Kane's second wife has committed suicide, and Kane bursts into the room with the doctor. The scene is lit so that the things you see are them bursting into the room, the wife in the bed, and the bottle of pills. By a complex optical matte, everything was properly lit so that in that one scene you instantly saw the three elements that told the story of what had happened. Comic-book coloring should do the same thing. It should draw attention to what's important in the specific panel and in the specific page and in the entire story. The emphasis should be put where it belongs — where the artist and writer have hopefully put it earlier.

One of the ways that I learned to color was by correcting the color guides that came in, originally under the direction of **Jack Adler** and eventually just on my own — punching up stories, correcting continuity, and so on. If you're a fairly quick learner you learn not to make those mistakes yourself.

DAK: *When he was Editor-in-chief at Marvel, Roy Thomas used to have a technique whereby if you wanted freelance work you more or less had to sell yourself into slavery by accepting a staff position at a very low wage. I came to realize that it was an exceptionally good way of doing things, because you really could learn a lot from people's mistakes. Many times when I was working on staff, Roy would say, "Doesn't this writer know — " and I'd make a note of it.*

TONY: Also, you never realize how important the deadlines are until you're the person who's put in the bind when someone else misses them. **Bob Rozakis** does a very good job of distributing the coloring fairly, and he's acting as production manager and organizing the production duties of thirty-some magazines. And if he doesn't have people turning in work consistently on time that would become thirty-some headaches. The fact that I was on staff doesn't mean I never get into a deadline problem. I just moved into a new house about a month-and-a-half ago. We got very disorganized. But I do understand after seven-and-a-half years on staff the problems that the production department, the printers and the separators and everyone has, when the book is late.

DAK: *Well, when a book is late, it really affects the colorists, doesn't it?*

TONY: The colorist is at the end of the process. People miss their deadlines, the project gets delayed, and you get it and are told, "Can you have this done tomorrow?" And you try your very best to do it, because that's how you prove your value — by doing quality work and helping the company out of binds. But when you're freelance, as I am now, you end up working days, nights, and weekends.

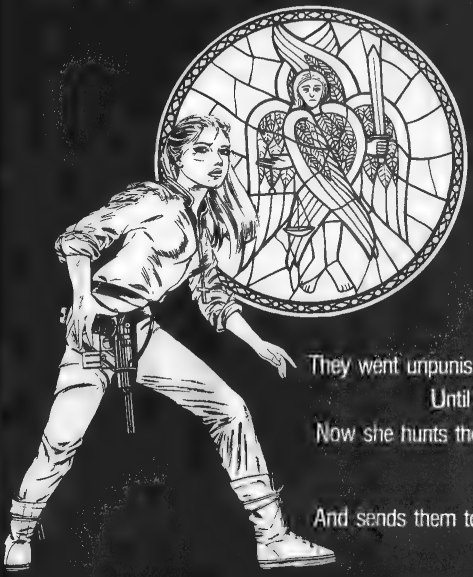
DAK: *Are you happy working at DC?*

TONY: There's more excitement at DC now then there's been in the last ten years. A year or two before I got into the business, things were very exciting at DC with **Kirby's** NEW GODS, **Kubert's** TARZAN, GREEN LANTERN/GREEN ARROW, and SWAMP THING. Then there were several years where DC was just kind of treading water, and I think there was a kind of depression in the office. DC didn't want to try anything new. A lot of who of us were new in the business really wondered how long the business would last. Since **Jenette Kahn** took over there's a feeling that we're starting anew. There are exciting new books coming out. We've got TEEN TITANS and the other books that are selling real well, we've got Baxter books, we've got new people coming into the business, and older artists getting inspired again. It's a wonderful time to be here.

DAK: *Anything you're unhappy about?*

TONY: I wish I had more time for my writing and other projects outside comics. But I'm pretty satisfied with my work, and my life in general. I know other people who get into this business — after wanting to be in comics all their lives — and as soon as they get into it they start nitpicking and finding things wrong with it. But I consider myself lucky to be working in comics. I mean, occasionally I'm down in the lunch room and I realize I'm talking to **Curt Swan** or **Joe Kubert** or other artists I grew up idolizing. Or I'll be working in my new home — which I can do now that I'm a freelancer — in my new office watching the ducks and the Canadian geese swim by in the river in our backyard, and it's a very nice environment to work in. I used to get into a lot of scraps unnecessarily, because I'd let things bother me. But now I just like to focus on things that I like. I think I lead a very happy life.

GOD'S LAW IS HER LAW.



They went unpunished.
Until she arrived.
Now she hunts them down...
one
by
And sends them to Hell...one
one
by
one.

STORY BY CHARLES DIXON PENCILED BY JUDITH HUNT
INKED BY RICARDO VILLAGRAN LETTERED BY ROD OLLERNSHAW

EVANGELINE™

COMICO THE COMIC COMPANY 1984

"The market's grown. Most of the growth has been from the alternative press."

MARK HAMLIN

Between the cheery light of a blazing Yule fire and the shadow of a tall, popcorn-bedecked Christmas tree, the COMICS INTERVIEW crew — with guest Roger Slifer — gathered around the dinner table for a holiday feast. In from the cold winter night came a much-delayed but welcome guest, Mark Hamlin, direct sales and distribution representative for Comico and Americomics, taking a much-needed respite from his far-ranging travels on behalf of his clients. (Mark was, until recently, Marketing Director of Texas Comics. He resigned his partnership position when Texas Comics suspended publication.) Over dessert, Mark regaled us with his adventures and shared some very interesting insights into the world of marketing alternative comic books . . .

DAK: *What exactly is it that you do for the publishers?*

MARK HAMLIN: Well, I'm a sales and distribution agent, basically a business and marketing consultant. I advise my clients what I think might and might not sell, although they make all the artistic and production decisions themselves. I make stronger recommendations on actual

"What sells is what people like, not what

marketing and distribution. I give advice on a non-legal basis on the contents of contracts which, I hope, saves some money and time with their attorneys. I also tend to be an expediter when it comes to things like bill collections, or problems with the production of the books. If something's being held up it affects me directly on the sales and distribution and marketing end, and that's when I get involved in clearing up the problem, if it's in my power to do so. I try to help the companies get out a professional product.

LESLEY BENJAMIN-AULL: *Do you actually solicit orders from the distributors?*

MARK: Yes, I work on solicitation and sales, and handle most of the purchase orders.

DAK: *How many titles are the companies you represent publishing, altogether?*

MARK: **Bill Black** will continue his ongoing books — AMERICOMICS, which is going quarterly, and BLACK DIAMOND — and he'll also have the new CAPTAIN PARAGON. In addition, he'll have other new titles — STAR MASTERS, BOLT and NIGHTVEIL. Comico has two new color books — MAGE, by **Matt Wagner,** who did GRENDEL for them, and EVANGELINE, by **Chuck Dixon** and **Judith Hunt.** They'll also be doing AZ and SLAUGHTERMAN in color. SKROG has been skragged. *(Laughter.)* **Bill Cucinotta,** the creator of SKROG, is going to be working on a much more refined character, a macabre individual: PAIN. Comico has another interesting work scheduled, which **Shel Dorf** is involved in, called ARMAGEDDON WARRIORS. Comico will do PRIMER, not as a money-maker but as a try-out book, where people will get to see their things in print for the first time —and where they'll feature first appearances of a lot of characters.

BILL CHADWICK: *Are you going to stick with these companies, or are you going to build up your stable?*

MARK: The basic idea of a manufacturer's rep is that you spread the cost of marketing and distribution over several different smaller companies that can't afford to have a complete network of their own. There is a possibility that I would accept additional clients, but I would certainly be selective, and I really wouldn't be interested until I have things in proper order with my existing clients.

DAK: *Aren't your clients in competition with each other?*

MARK: No, because they aim at different segments of the market. Americomics is specifically aimed at middle and younger readers and they have some good rousing adventure-type action books — the type of things which appeal to a more general reader. Comico aims at a more sophisticated, adult comic-book reader who's looking for more controversial subject material, complex writing, and sophisticated themes. Each line of comics has its own appeal.

DAK: *Before you began doing it for them, the publishers at these companies would solicit orders and handle sales themselves. What do they gain by paying you to handle these functions?*

MARK: First of all they gain time to concentrate on the aspects of production which they are more expert on. Most people who get into comic-book publishing tend to be artists, writers, and editors — people who are into creating the product, and not so much the business or sales end of the industry. For instance, **Bill Black** of Americomics was for years moderately successful at Paragon Publications, putting out things like FUN COMICS, but he felt limited because he had to spend time on sales and distribution, and this was time he couldn't be putting into art or production. He also felt his success was limited because he wasn't doing as good a job at sales and distribution as somebody who was a little more professional in those fields could do. And he felt he was tied too much to his studio and his drawing board, and didn't have time to go to shows and conventions and meet the distributors and retailers and fans face-to-face. Same thing with the people at Comico.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mark L. Hamlin
Occupation: Sales and distribution agent
Born: Grand Rapids, Michigan
Residence: Grand Rapids — when I'm not on the road.
Hobbies and Interests: History, economics, dancing, hiking, and comics
Favorite Current Comics: THOR, AMERICAN FLAGG, FANTASTIC FOUR, GRENDEL
Favorite Comics of the Past: The early SPIDER-MAN, the Disney comics, the Captain America and Iron Man stories in TALES OF SUSPENSE.
Taste in Comic Art: Art that is detailed but not overworked. I like the dynamism of John Byrne's figures but find that his art lacks details. On the other hand, while I also like Howard Chaykin's art, he tends to put in too many details.
Pet Peeve: Reprint comics, especially when the originals are still available.

Cover of Americomics' BLACK DIAMOND #4. Art by Paul Gulacy.

© 1983 Americomics

Cover of Comico's MAGE # 1. Art by creator Matt Wagner.

© 1984 Matt Wagner

somebody's trying to force-feed them."

What makes it worth it to them to pay me to do these things is, I think, that in various ways, I save them — or make them — more money than it costs to employ me. That comes from a lot of ends. It comes from improving the efficiency of their distribution so that they're not paying double freight on something. It can come down to keeping their print-runs more in line with what they're really selling, so they're not ending up with cases of unsold books and wasting their money. It can be just giving them some good advice on something which is *not* going to sell. It could be giving them representation at a convention that they couldn't attend themselves. There are a lot of little things I do that add up. I think what's probably most attractive to them is that I'm willing to take some of the risks myself. Only a small part of my expenses are directly reimbursed by the clients I work for — I eat all my own sales and distribution expenses, and I count on the commission they pay me for copies sold to not only cover my expenses but also provide me a living. If I don't sell enough of their product, I'm not even going to be able to cover my own expenses, much less be able to make a decent living. I think the other thing that's attractive is that they pay me based on results. I get paid for copies of the books that not only get sold — but that they actually collect their money on — and I get paid after they've collected, not just after they've sold.

ROGER SLIFER: *To what extent, if any, do you dealt with retail accounts?*

MARK: I deal with retail accounts to the extent that I travel around the country and stop in every little rural town and find out if they have a comics store. If they do, I walk in and say, "Hi! Do you sell our products?!" I want to see if a retailer is getting our flyers and our promotional posters and things like that. I like to get face-to-face with the retailer, because I'm very interested in what's selling — not just our products — but everybody's. And I also like to hear what the retailers have to say about what they and their customers like and don't like about each and every one of our titles. Also, sometimes they're not aware that the books are selling as *well* as they are! One instance comes to mind: I walked into a store, saw four copies of the current JUSTICE MACHINE on the rack, pointed that fact out to the owner, and asked her if she'd sold the rest or put them into back-stock. "Oh, I've got four left? Yeah, I musta sold the rest, because I didn't put any up for back-stock." "Well, how many did you order?" "Well, I ordered thirty-five. No, wait a minute, that's a re-order. No, that actually was my second re-order." She had ordered thirty-five copies originally, and re-ordered thirty-five copies, and then re-ordered *another* thirty-five copies. I said, "Well,

© 1983 Americomics

Rik Levins' Scarlet Scorpion, a new super-hero from Americomics. Art by Steve Lightle and Jerry Ordway.

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VOO DOO NIGHT?
HE HAS THE MOST POWERFUL MIND ON EARTH... BUT WAS THE PRICE HE PAID WORTH IT?
PSION!
BY RIK LEVINS BILL BLACK AND WILLIE BLYBERG
PSION
AC COMICS

"We don't have any false expectations."

© 1983 Chuck Dixon and Judith Hunt

this is a $2.25 issue, and you sold one hundred and one copies?" And the store-owner goes, "Gee, I didn't realize that — but I have!" I asked, "So, how many copies did you order on the next issue?" "Oh . . . thirty-five." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *Exactly! I've had the same experience with retailers who often don't realize how well COMICS INTERVIEW sells.*

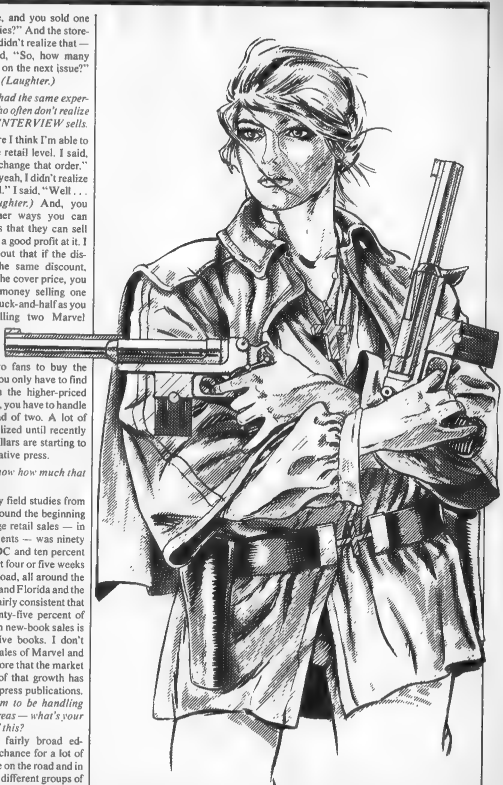
MARK: This is where I think I'm able to do some good on the retail level. I said, "Well, you'd better change that order." And she said, "Well, yeah, I didn't realize it was selling that well." I said, "Well . . . they're gone." *(Laughter.)* And, you know, there are other ways you can convince the retailers that they can sell your books and make a good profit at it. I always like to point out that if the distributor gives you the same discount, percentage-wise, off the cover price, you will make as much money selling one alternative book at a buck-and-half as you would get from selling two Marvel or DC books at seventy-five cents apiece. So, while you have to find two fans to buy the Marvel or DC title, you only have to find one fan interested in the higher-priced alternative book. Plus, you have to handle only *one* book instead of two. A lot of retailers have not realized until recently how much of their dollars are starting to come from the alternative press.

LESLEY: *Do you know how much that percentage is?*

MARK: Based on my field studies from talking to retailers, around the beginning of the year the average retail sales — in terms of dollars and cents — was ninety percent Marvel and DC and ten percent alternatives. In the last four or five weeks that I've been on the road, all around the southwest Texas area and Florida and the South, it seems to be fairly consistent that about twenty- to twenty-five percent of their cash income from new-book sales is coming from alternative books. I don't think that means the sales of Marvel and DC have fallen. It's more that the market has grown and most of that growth has been from alternative press publications.

DAK: *Well, you seem to be handling quite a few different areas — what's your background for all of this?*

MARK: I've had a fairly broad education involving the chance for a lot of travel, and I'm at home on the road and in strange cities and with different groups of people. I worked my way through college in retailing, and managed some manufacturing and production plants, then



Evangeline, gun-slinging nun and title-heroine of a new series from Comico. "She really is on a mission from God." Art by Judith Hunt.

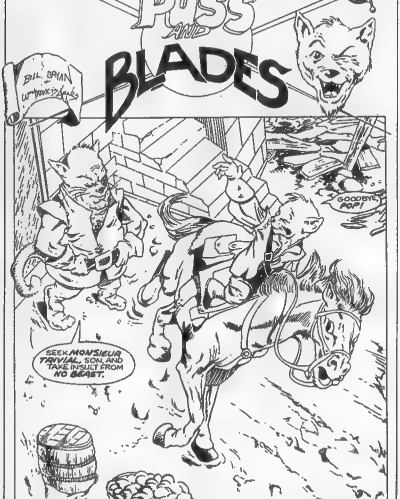
"Sometimes I advise retailers *not* to buy

ended up going into business for myself. I ran a small retail store, worked for a small retailer, and I've worked with a couple of small publishers from the ground up. I also have been quite a student of history from the economic end. I've always been interested in marketing — the way products are not just produced, but distributed and sold.

DAK: *How long have you been doing this?*

MARK: Well, I started out about three years ago. I happened to be working with a friend of mine who owns a comic-book shop, and **Mike Gustovich** walked in with the first issue of THE JUSTICE MACHINE in his hot little hand. He said, "I've got this book I just finished, and I'd like to sell it. I've already printed it, but I don't know where to sell the first copy. Do you think you could help me sell it?" I looked at it and said, "Well, this really shows some promise." Here was an all-color alternative-type comic in the Spring of 1981, back when the market was almost *all* Marvel and DC. I said, "This looks good. I think I can sell it." I asked Mike, "How many do you have?" He said, "I printed up 11,500 copies." And we went, dubiously, "Ooookay . . ." Well, I'm very happy to report that we sold them all, even though some were slightly damaged. Today, I buy copies back wholesale for four or five dollars, if they're in real nice shape, and sell them for fifteen dollars a copy. So I guess that book could be considered a success, and as his book became more and more successful, everyone wanted Mike to work for them. He decided he could not continue publishing, himself, but he didn't want his property to just die, so we ended up having Texas Comics take over JUSTICE MACHINE.

"Puss and Blades," by Bill Bryan and Bill Loebs, appears in Comico's PRIMER #3. Artist Loebs went to prominence with his series JOURNEY for Aardvark-Vanaheim.



© 1983 Bill Bryan and William Francis Loebs

Comico and Americomics decided that it would be to their advantage to have a sales and distribution agent to take over some of those responsibilities, so that they could concentrate on getting their product out and up to the standards they wanted to see. They called me and I told them I didn't want to worry about competition among sales and distribution agents. I felt that I needed to handle their lines *exclusively* if I handled them at all. They agreed that it would be a good idea to have an exclusive agent who would be able to have some control over all the sales and distribution. I'm very happy with the way it's going. I think my clients are very happy. I've gotten some very positive feedback from them on it.

DAK: *Have you had any noticeable effect on sales?*

MARK: When I took over the Comico line they hadn't yet launched their new color titles and color books are going to sell three or four times as many copies as any black-and-white books, so I certainly can't take credit for the increase in orders we've had recently. At the time I took over Americomics they were in a situation of declining sales, because their books were in second and third and fourth issues — which is, of course, when almost all publishers see a decline in sales. We do feel, based on current orders, that the sales figures have bottomed out, and we've already seen an increase in some of the orders for the books that are coming out in the next couple of months — for instance, the first new title that I helped them launch, CAPTAIN PARAGON, is at this point not only entirely sold out from the publisher, the distributors have very few left. It's important that a book sell out, not just from the publisher to the distributor — that's a temporary success. The *real* success is seeing that it sells out right down to the retailer, so that *nobody*

certain issues from some of my clients."

© 1983 Americomics

Captain Paragon, Americomics' chief super-hero and star of his own flagship title. Art by Greg Guler and Bill Black.

gets stuck with any copies. Those copies that are not sold right down to the fans who want to read them are copies that are going to tie up somebody's capital, and that's going to be capital that they can't use to buy the next book. If you're a publisher, your bread is always buttered with the next issue — not the last one. If you've gouged your market by flooding it with more copies of your book than what it can absorb, then in the long run you've done yourself no favors. I know that I'm happy with the way the books are selling out, right down the line. I advise retailers, sometimes, *not* to buy certain issues of certain titles from some of my clients, and my clients know this — but it's the ones I feel that they're not going to be able to sell, given the type of market they service. It may be something that I might feel would be too controversial for their market, or something which I have to admit did not turn out up to the standard that we would like to see. We don't want anyone to get stuck with any extra copies.

DAK: *What if they order thirteen and one doesn't sell? It sounds as if the only way the sales of the books could go would be down, if you're going to play things that close and not encourage expansion.*

MARK: But I am. When somebody sells out, I encourage them to order more. I don't encourage them to triple their order, but I do encourage them to add a *reasonable* number of copies of the next issue. That way they can build up to the potential of their market without being stuck with so many that they cut their next order back too far and some fans then can't find the next issue. There's nothing that'll turn a fan off more quickly if he's trying to collect a title, than finding one issue in plentiful supply, and then not being able to get the next issue and ending up with a gap in his collection.

LESLEY: *To what extent do you think you can affect retail demand?*

MARK: Well . . . that's a real hard question. I think retail demand depends more upon the caliber of the product than on the way it's presented. You can hype something and over-sell — Comico did this and it ruined the market for some of their black-and-white books. But if you have something that's really quality, people will notice that, and they'll keep coming back. And that doesn't have so much to do with what the sales and marketing person does, but what the production person does as far as putting quality into his product and giving good value for the price. I honestly rely upon the books that I'm selling building their circulation, based on the fact that we give a good value for the price we charge. I'm not relying on hype to cram books down people's throats. There's no way I can force people to enjoy. When you're talking about entertainment media, it's going to be what people like, not what somebody's trying to force-feed them, that's going to end up selling, over and over again.

ROGER: *A lot of the comic-book companies over the years have had less than a total commitment to certain of their titles. What do you see as the degree of commitment from the publishers you represent? I mean, do they have any pre-established commitment — three issues, six, whatever?*

MARK: Well, of course, something that the public does not want and will not buy is not something that will make a profit, and therefore can't be continued. But all of the companies that I'm working for have a real commitment to their titles. It may be for a certain, pre-established number of issues, which is usually announced at the start — as for example, GRENDEL, where they're going to have six issues and then discontinue it. Most of

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WILL BOLT SAVE THE WORLD...OR DESTROY IT?!
COMICS
JERRY ORDWAY

"Marvel has been flooding the market."

the titles we're doing now are intended to be continued titles. They're intended to grab readers and hold them over a long period of time. We don't start *any* continuing title with the idea of ever discontinuing it.

ROGER: *But sometimes it takes a while to build that kind of readership. I think one of the major mistakes of this business is that there's not a long-enough commitment to titles. Publishers in other fields launching new magazines don't expect them to catch on in just six months.*

MARK: Oh, we don't have any false expectations. We don't believe that our books are going to grab a huge segment of the market by the third issue. We expect the usual patterns — that the first issue will sell well, that the second and third issues will see a slight decrease in sales, and that if it's good the fourth, fifth and sixth issues will see modest increases in sales. Then we'd expect sales to increase to the point where we're making a profit.

LESLEY: *There's been a lot of talk about Marvel "flooding the market" — what do you think about that?*

MARK: Well, they're not doing as much of it as they were. Marvel definitely has been flooding the market with a lot of publications, many of which, in my opinion, didn't deserve to see print, notably a lot of their reprints. I think they did it because they knew they'd make a profit, especially with the lower cost for art that they have on reprints. Now the retailers are stuck with an awful lot of copies of those reprints, just like retailers have been stuck with many copies of certain titles by DC recently.

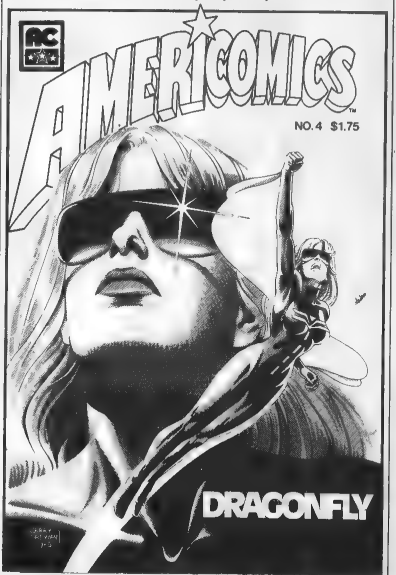
LESLEY: *Are you sure that's what happened — that it was profit-motivated — rather than an attack on the alternatives?*

MARK: It was profit-motivated. If they were using it as an assault on the alternatives it would have been the most foolish tactic they could have used, because flooding the market with substandard product only makes your competition look good — not bad. I think Marvel made money and now they're running with it — that's why you're not seeing very many more reprints or mini-series. I think they have a new ploy with this "Secret War" project and I think that they're going to milk it for all it's worth, although I have my doubts as to whether it'll be successful. I don't think Marvel did what they did in direct sales, with reprints in particular, with the specific purpose of trying to hurt the competition. They were just trying to make a profit. That's the name of the game — who can make the most money.

BILL: *You mentioned being interested in the "economic end" of history. If you were writing an economic history of what's going on in the comics field, why do you think the business is undergoing such a change at this point?*

MARK: Because the change has been pent up over the past decade. Comics did not change much from the Sixties to the present, until the last couple years. Comics lost a lot of contemporary relevance over that span, and they lost a lot of readership — which is why comics now sell in the hundred thousands at the best, when they used to sell millions. I think that a lot of today's change is comics catching up, to be relevant in a present-day context. I feel that comics can actually be relevant in the present day, and I feel they actually have a significant place as an entertainment and a communication medium of the future. Someone once said to me that a comic is a great story that you can take on the bus. I'd like to see you take your favorite arcade game in a car, down to the beach, and then find a place to plug it in. Comics can be enjoyed when you can't some of the other entertainment media that are available today. Also comics have a graphic impact. One of the problems that novels have is competing with that idiot box, television. People tend to be a

Cover of AMERICOMICS #4 starring Dragonfly — one of several Americomics heroines. Art by Jerry Ordway.



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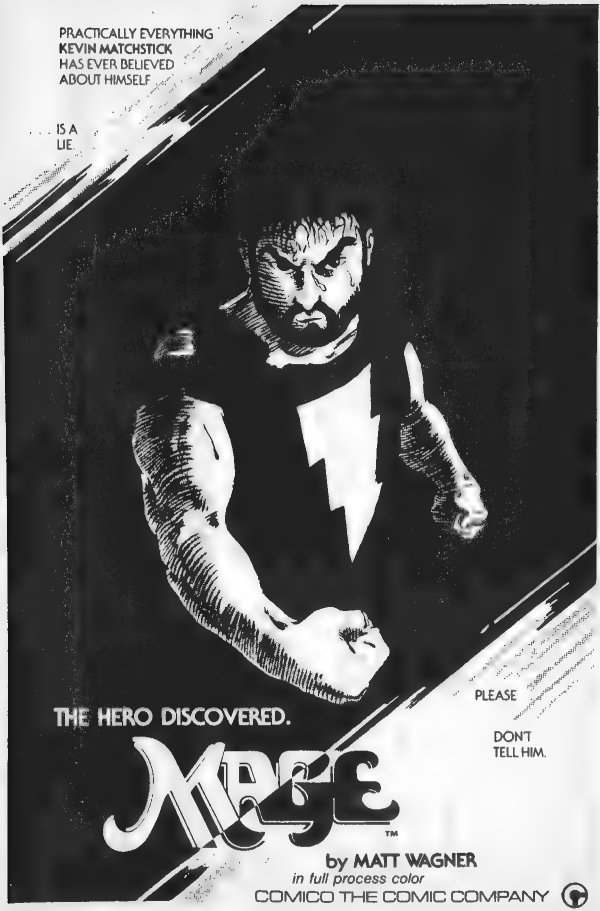
PRACTICALLY EVERYTHING
KEVIN MATCHSTICK
HAS EVER BELIEVED
ABOUT HIMSELF
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LIE.
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"It can be a good business for everybody."

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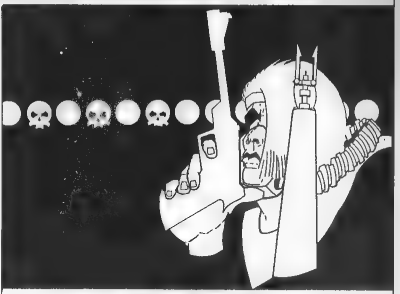
little bit lazy. They might not mind doing a certain amount of reading, but they don't like to have to imagine the entire scenario without guidelines. A picture is worth a thousand words — and a comic has maybe fifty or a hundred pictures. You can tell quite a story in a graphic format.

DAK: *But comics have been visual all along and yet they were on the decline — what finally released that pent-up change you mentioned?*

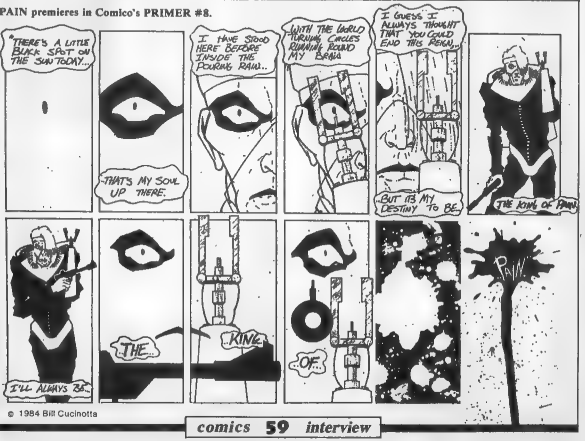
MARK: There are a lot of factors. One is that comics have lately been attracting more sophisticated adult readers. They're losing some of the "kid stuff" stigma. One of the things that led to the decline of comics in the Seventies was simple demographics. The Baby Boom kids of the Forties grew up and outgrew their comics in the Sixties, but they didn't have children of their own — to become new fans — until the Seventies. And so now, in the Eighties, some of these six-and eight- and ten-year-old sons and daughters of the comic-book fans of the Sixties are starting to buy comics for the first time and you are finding that some of the people who were fans back in the Sixties are becoming, through their sons and daughters, interested in comics again. During the Seventies these old fans were spending all their time just trying to make a living. Also, the many reprints that came out in the early Seventies turned a lot of the old fans off because they'd already read that stuff in the Sixties while some of the new stuff coming out was substandard. A lot of problems turned off the old readers and there simply weren't, until now, as many kids to become new readers.



Cover of PAIN #1, by Bill Cucinotta, coming from Comico.

ROGER: *Given the new generation of kids that you see becoming fans, won't*

PAIN premieres in Comico's PRIMER #8.


"THERE'S A LITTLE BLACK SPOT ON THE SUN TODAY..."
THAT'S MY SOUL UP THERE.
I HAVE STOOD HERE BEFORE INSIDE THE POURING RAIN..
WITH THE WORLD TURNING CIRCLES RUNNING ROUND MY BRAIN
I GUESS I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT YOU COULD END THIS PAIN...
BUT IT'S MY DESTINY TO BE
THE KING OF PAIN
I'LL ALWAYS BE
THE
KING
OF...
PAIN

© 1984 Bill Cucinotta

"If you have something that's quality,

there be problems with the adult nature of so many comics today?

MARK: I think there is a problem with the adult content of comics when it's not handled right, particularly by the retailer. I also think that publishers have a certain responsibility to indicate when they have adult-oriented content in the book.

DAK: *With the growth in alternative publishers and the direct sales market do you think that the new supply is going to create demand?*

MARK: Yes, that does seem to be what's happening. Every time somebody gets comics into a new location, more comics sell. Now some of that has to be at the expense of some of the indirect newsstand sales because selling comics through newsstand distribution is not profitable for a retailer. The maximum amount of profit margin that a retailer has on a newsstand comic book is thirty percent and some of them only get twenty percent. That's on the copies they sell, and for each copy they sell they usually have to return two. So at twenty percent profit — thirty percent at best — the most they make on a sixty-or seventy-five cent comic is maybe twenty or thirty cents on a book. And since they've had to handle two or three copies to sell that one copy, it really doesn't make sense in terms of shelf space, the handling time, the accounting time to return the books, and so on, to handle comics. It gets to the point where comics, with their low cover price, are a loser and not a money- maker, for your drug stores, convenience stores, and places like that, particularly in rural areas. Fifteen years ago — and this is why there were so much higher sales figures for a lot of titles, fifteen years ago — you used to have comics sold in two or three locations in every small town. Now you're lucky if you can find one place that sells comics and that's because it's real hard for the indirect, newsstand-type retailer to make any money on them. The direct sales market changes all that — not only can the direct-sales retailers make a bigger margin of profit but, by ordering smart, they aren't handling books that have to be returned. What's happening now is that a lot of direct distributors are starting to put books into places that haven't sold comics for years — a bookstore in a mall, a stop-and-go ma-and-pa grocery, a pharmacy in a small town, a bait-and-tackle place — places that give comics public exposure. More people are seeing comics and seeing the new things that are coming out, so more people will buy and read comics again. This is where you're seeing the new growth in the market.

BILL: *Dick Giordano told us that there was a potential growth-rate in the comics industry of 400 percent, and Mike Friedrich in another interview said that was a conservative estimate. What's your opinion?*

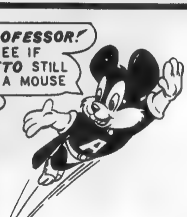
MARK: I think **Friedrich** was right, as far as the potential. How soon that potential can be realized is another matter. I do expect to see a substantial increase in the

Of historical interest: the one and only JUSTICE MACHINE ANNUAL. Mark Hamlin has now severed his ties with the publisher, Texas Comics.

© 1983 Texas Comics, Mike Gustovich & Bill Wiltingham

people will notice and keep coming back."

© 1983 Disney



The return of Atomic Mouse! From AMERICOMICS #4. Art by Martin L. Greim and Al Bradford.

comic market in each of the next five years.

DAK: *Have you considered that one of the companies you represent just possibly could have the growth potential Marvel had in the Sixties?*

MARK: Oh, I think that's very possible. It certainly wouldn't break my heart if it turned out to be that way. What's going to happen is that everybody's going to do their best, and the market will pick which company it likes the best. That may be the comics from one or more of the publishers I'm representing, it may be comics published by Marvel or DC, or Pacific or First. It may be that there's going to be another company nobody's heard from yet. **Burne Hogarth** was telling me in San Diego that a new kind of comic will emerge that will be as revolutionary in some ways as Marvel's comic-book formula was in the 1960s, and it would be as different from comics and cartooning as they are from each other. He thinks that this is going to be the wave of the future and it's going to sweep the marketplace. And I said, "That's nice, Burne — that could happen and I'd like to see it happen. And if the guy who has this wonderful brilliant idea comes to me and shows it to me first, I hope I'm smart enough to recognize it for what it is, grab a hold of it, and get it published by a company that I have a piece of, so I can profit by it, too. But in the mean time all that anybody is going to be able to do is the best that they know how, based on the way things are going now, while everybody's looking for this new thing —"

DAK: — *The Grail.* (Laughter.)

MARK: We're committed to that. But I do think there's an element of truth to what Burne said. There's always some new development out there. It's like the better mousetrap. If I knew what it was I'd be building it myself right now.

I want to say that I'm not entirely down on the biggest competition. It can be a good business for everybody. I believe that the best interests of everybody in this business are in the growth of the market, not in cutting each other's throats. I really feel that there is a significant untapped market for comics. I see no reason why titles can't sell a million copies as they have in the past. I see no reason why there can't be twice as many successful titles as there are in the market now. If I really get down on any activities by any publisher it's when I feel they are abusing the market — when, for short-term gain, they are doing something which is going to hurt the overall market. The most important thing is to cultivate that market, because the important thing is not just how big a slice of the pie you have, but how big a pie you're slicing up. The bigger the pie, the bigger everybody's slice.

DAK: *Mark, have you given any thought to where you are going — personally and with these companies?*

MARK: I'm hoping in some ways that I'll have ironed out some of the problems you run into when you try to establish new lines of books and of course I hope to reap some kind of rewards for doing a good job. But I really haven't thought a whole lot further than what I face now. There is an incredible amount of problems that have to be looked at in establishing new products in a marketplace. Since I am an exclusive-type sales and distribution agent, I haven't even begun to address the foreign markets, the merchandising markets, and all of the various other things that will hopefully increase our profitability and visibility in the marketplace. Right now I can only see myself doing pretty much what I'm doing now, only hopefully in a bigger and bigger way.

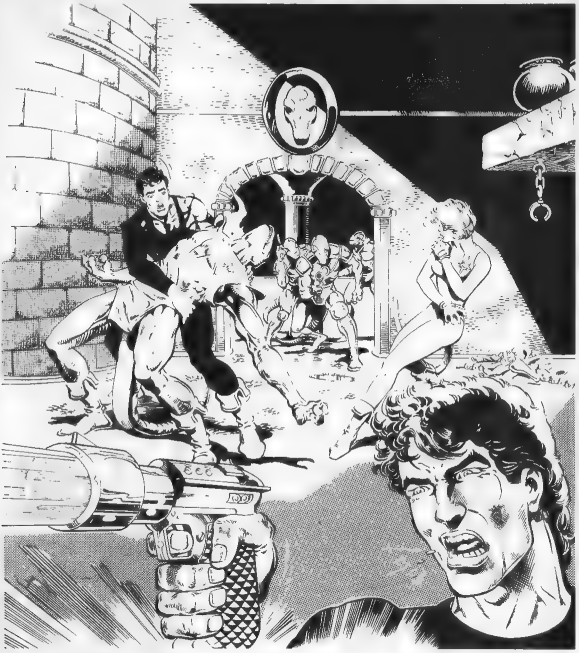
DAK: *So you've found your niche — you're doing what you want to do?*

MARK: Oh, yes, I enjoy what I'm doing. I actually represent products that I believe in. I like the fact that I provide a service to my clients as well as to the distributors I work with, and to the retailers who sell our books. I like the idea that with every single new title and issue I help sell and distribute, I help give a lot of fun to tens of thousands of people. Lord knows I do it for the satisfaction — at this point it sure isn't for the money! *(Laughter.)*

Right: Americomics' Black Diamond. The sultry secret agent will be featured in her own movie, starring Sybil Danning.

© 1983 Americomics

RIK THOUGHT WAR WAS FINISHED FOREVER.



HE WAS WRONG.

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

DC FOLKS ARE FAVES

Dear Mr. Kraft!

By Rao! Many thanks for your Christmas card. I reciprocate the holiday greetings belatedly. Of course, I have been reading DAK's COMICS INTERVIEW ever since #1, and I am renewing my subscription for another 12 issues. I have really enjoyed reading the interviews you conducted with various DC Comics writers, artists and fans. Those DC people are my favorites!

I have also, of course, been reading your nice stories in WORLD'S FINEST COMICS featuring Superman and Batman, who have been locked in battle against the menace of The Pantheon, The Cosmic Tree idea is excellent! And the cafeteria scene in which both superheroes sought solitude but met face-to-face with the South African mercenaries (WF #302) is really funny and original.

It was amusing when a mercenary shouted that Superman and Batman were on location to begin filming SUPERMAN IV. I appeared briefly in the Smallville scene in SUPERMAN III, where there were lots of people around (actually filmed at Calgary and High River).

You might also be surprised to hear that my real, Asian Indian name is J. V. Rao. (Superman and Supergirl and Superboy often say "By Rao!" etc.) I dropped it in 1969 legally, but was flattered and amused seeing my family name in comics. I think Rao — the Sun God of Krypton — is a fabulous idea.

Don Stromberg (a/k/a/ Rao)
9927 76th Street
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada T6A 3A1

PREUSS NOT PRICE

Dear Bill (and Dave):

Thank you for your very friendly treatment in the pages of INTERVIEW #8. The article turned out quite a bit better than I'd hoped (when Steve and I were talking, I kept thinking, "Oh no, what a lot of drivel.")

The only correction: **Karin Preus** is the hands-on art director for NEXUS, and she is gaining quite a reputation locally as a major designer.

Thought the **Bill Griffith** interview was the tits as well. I've got ALL the pinhead material. Norbert reads it all the time.

Mike Baron
2809 Century Harbor #2
Middleton, WI 53562

THE LAST CARTOON

Dear DAK,

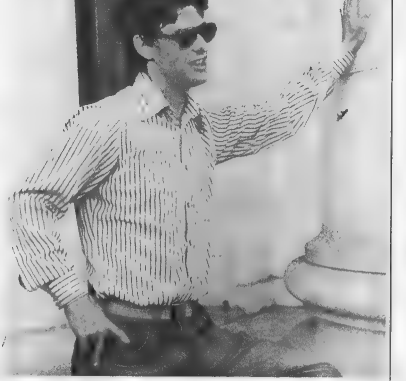
In the dim, muddled memories of early school years, I recall picking up the occasional comic. TALES OF SOMETHING with Captain America and Iron Man, the Human Torch and the Thing making a fool out of Paste-Pot Pete and the Hulk battling someone who had a bunch of little rubber guys working for him. And, of course, I had to buy the plastic models of my heroes. Spidey on a staircase railing zapping Kraven the Hunter with webbing, and Cap leaping over the ruins of a bombed-out building into a mud-puddle!! Great stuff!! Naturally, I watched the FF cartoons that were on Saturday back then. But what really brought me close to super-heroes, really captured my imagination, occurred a few years earlier.

I was about five. My family lived in a small two-bedroom apartment on Waterman Street just off Gravois Avenue somewhere in the middle of St. Louis, Missouri. I had gotten terribly sick one day, and a friend of mine from upstairs skipped school to cheer me up. Sometime during the day we turned on the TV, and this wonderfully colorful little guy came on, just for me, just to make me laugh.

It was a locally produced "kiddie" show and the fella's name was Corky the Clown. He had the brightest orange hair and the silliest size-39 shoes I'd ever seen. About ten minutes into the program, we were instructed to "watch this next cartoooooooon!!!!!"

The first one I remember was . . . THE INCREDIBLE HULK!!! Of course, I had no idea what a hulk was, much less what incredible meant, but it didn't matter. Hulk had just tangled with Boomerang and some General named Ross was always mad about something. I loved it!! Later came the SUB-MAREENER fighting Attuma and a giant squid, and CAPTAIN AMERICA battling it out with Batroc the

Mike Baron



Coming In JUNE From
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DALGODA DEBARKS ON EARTH
...In 1984's most stunning color comic!

The rumors are true!

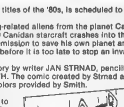
Dalgoda, one of the most eagerly awaited comics titles of the '80s, is scheduled to ship to the nation's distributors on the first day of June, 1984.

In the not too distant future, a friendly race of dog-related aliens from the planet Canida have communicated with Earth. When an unscheduled Canidan starcraft crashes into the Pacific Ocean, Dalgoda's adventures begin. He's on a mission to save his own planet and Earth as well. Will the authorities of Earth listen to Dalgoda before it is too late to stop an invasion by malevolent aliens? Only time will tell.

This premiere issue features a special 44-page story by writer JAN STRNAD, penciller and inker DENNIS FUJITAKE, and colorist KENNETH SMITH. The comic created by Strnad and Fujitake has an added spice in the unique and stunning colors provided by Smith.

Fantagraphics Books is certain that this book will soon become a fan favorite. Retailers should be ready to order back orders immediately after their stock of the first issue runs out. A special incentive plan has been worked out with distributors that will allow them to carry extra back stock of the first issue. This extra back stock will mean very quick response to reorders.

And be ready for an upsurge in back orders on **#1** when **#2** hits the stands in August with a back-up by fan favorite KEVIN NOWLAN!



1984 Jan Strnad & Dennis Fujitake

Dalgoda #1. 48-page full-color comic. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. Shipping in June. $2.25. (Canada: $2.75) x _____ [quantity]

Annie Featured in NEMO: The Classic Comics Library #8

THOSE OLD NEWSPAPER CAMPAIGNS MADE IT LOOK LIKE ANNIE WAS GOING TO BE THERE FOR A LONG TIME!
BUT NOW SHE'S GOING TO HAVE TO GET OUT OF THE TOWN!
1984 C.T.N.Y.N.S.

HAROLD GRAY's Little Orphan Annie gets the red-carpet treatment in this issue, with feature articles by Ken Barker, Harry McCracken, and Donald Phelps. These articles offer exclusive information and insights into the nature of the strip, featuring a great abundance of Little Orphan Annie illustrations. Annie has gained a new popularity because of strip superstar LEONARD STARR's brilliant new version of the strip (and the smash movie didn't hurt, either!)

***NEMO* #8** also presents a special article on the famous cartoonist's first sales, with work by MORT WALKER, MILT GROSS, CHESTER GOULD, ROY CRANE, MILTON CANIFF, and others. Plus: an interview with animator JOE BARBERA (*Tom and Jerry, The Flintstones, The Jetsons*) with illustrations from his famous cartoons, more of the ALLEN SAUNDERS's autobiography, and "Penmen of the Past."

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NEMO: The Classic Comics Library #8. Published by Fantagraphics Books, Inc. $3.50. Shipping in June. (Canada: $4.25) x _____ [quantity]

PEREZ in Giant-Size AH #50
ADAMS, GOLDEN in AH #51

Amazing Heroes has a treat for everyone in its **50th Anniversary issue**. This issue aims to be better than The 1984 Preview Issue in ***AH* #39**—and we all remember how that one did! From Its Teen Titans cover by GEORGE PEREZ, to the Perez interview on the inside, to the in-depth discussion of Batman by DENNY O'NEIL and MIKE W. BARR, to many other surprises. An extra long review section, the return of Star Hawks,by ARCHIE GOODWIN and GIL KANE, and much more will make this 146-page summer special more than worth the price of admission

***Amazing Heroes* #51** continues the AMAZING summer issues AH has planned. This issue features an advance look at NEAL ADAMS's new Continuity Comics, with previews of work by MICHAEL GOLDEN, ART SUYDAM, and Adams himself! The cover is by GOLDEN! Also: DC's Atomic Knights

Both issues carry the latest news, up-to-date checklists, and zany silly covers that you've come to expect from *AH*.

Amazing Heroes #50. 146 pages. Published by Redbeard, Inc. Shipping in early June. $3.50. (Canada: $4.25) x _____ [quantity]

Amazing Heroes #51. Published by Redbeard, Inc. Shipping in late June. $1.95. (Canada: $2.50) x _____ [quantity]

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Leper (at least that's how I pronounced it).

During this period, I learned of Red Skulls, sleepers, Norse mythology, and gamma rays. I'm convinced to this day that it was this one program that opened my mind and started the creative juices flowing.

Corky was very special to me then. I remember how hurt I felt for him when some rip-off clown named Ronald started getting all the attention.

I don't know what happened to Corky the Clown or the people that produced the show, nor do I know if any other kid in the entire country ever saw it, but I do know that at that time, it all seemed so fantastic, so magical, so awesome, and it left a lasting impression on this kid. Which, I guess, proves that everything one does in life affects someone somewhere.

Thanks, and goodnight "Corky" . . . wherever you may be.

Stephen Looney
1401-E Garden Court
Chesapeake, VA 23322

HISTORICAL FOOTNOTE

Dear Dave:

I'm afraid an interview with me as a writer of comics would fill about two inches. I was involved in only two CAPTAIN AMERICA stories and had one short story published in the centerfold of MINUTE MAN COMICS, which I think only ran for about three issues. The CA pieces were farmed out by **Manly Wade Wellman** and written by me and a friend, **Rod Gaetz.** I was 16 at the time. It was fun and the $30 Rod and I split seemed like big money! But I was not a reader of comics then or later. Only comic mag I ever read was FAMOUS FUNNIES in early to mid-1930s.

Gerry de la Ree
7 Cedarwood Lane
Saddle River, NJ 07458

LETTER FROM LIVERPOOL

Dear Dave (The Dude) Kraft,

I am an undergraduate studying for my degree in Chemistry in Liverpool. While bumming around in this great city I was fortunate to spin a close friendship with the best-selling horror writer **Ramsey Campbell** (who makes this great city his home).

One cold and bleak night we were sheltering in my house contemplating the final draft of my first novel when Ramsey started to root through my extensive comic collection. Grabbing my copies of COMICS INTERVIEW he read issues one right through to six. He enjoyed the informal and candid interviews.

The point of this anecdote was culmination of me asking Ramsey if he would like to be interviewed. You see, apart from being one of the greatest living genre writers (second in sales only to a person called . . . um, err, what's-his-name — oh! — **Steve King**) Ramsey is a long-time comic fan. In fact, he tells of his early influence by comics. A letter of his can be found lurking in the pages of an EC comic (one of the limited run of reprints during the early Seventies) and he also dedicated his best-seller DEMONS BY DAYLIGHT to some obscure guys — namely **Stan Lee, Barry Smith, Jack Kirby, Denny O'Neil** and **Neal Adams.** In the introductions of his books, he often expresses his love for the comic-book medium.

The fact that I met Ramsey creeping around Liverpool's premier comic shop, Ogre Books, on the search for his latest Marvels proves the point.

This letter is to ask if you want an interview with rambling Ramsey. He is very excited about being interviewed, as he has a lot to say about comics that he has never been able to address to comic fandom.

I am suitably placed for this and will co-produce the interview with my great friend in fandom **Johnny Parker** (who at present is undergoing that horrendous torture: Teacher Training!). Both of us are long-time comic-book fans and suitably equipped for the interview. So how about it?

Please note how well received your publication is on these shores — it would be nice to see Britishers get some exposure in your magazine.

I still remember the autographs you and the Marvel Bullpen sent me three years ago. In fact, your message is emblazoned on my wall:

"To all my fans in England — you guys are my favorites, since you British Beasts seem to like my work. (Send £5 for my script rate.)" — DAK

Here in England the fanzines still mention the pinnacle of grandeur that you achieved with THE DEFENDERS way back in the '70s.

Ali Karim
8 Churchward Close
Chester CH2 2BG
Cheshire, England

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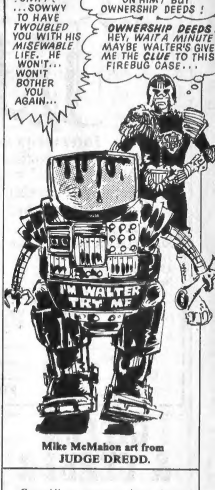
WALTER IS... ?SNIFF? ...SOWWY TO HAVE TWOUBLED YOU WITH HIS MISEWABLE LIFE. HE WON'T... WON'T BOTHER YOU AGAIN...
I WAS A BIT ROUGH ON HIM, BUT OWNERSHIP DEEDS !
OWNERSHIP DEEDS. HEY, WAIT A MINUTE. MAYBE WALTER'S GIVE ME THE CLUE TO THIS FIREBUG CASE...
I'M WALTER TRY ME

Mike McMahon art from JUDGE DREDD.

Gee, Ali — you sure know how to make a guy feel good. Thanks for the kind words about my comics work. I only hope you didn't take that aside about sending money seriously!

As for giving Britishers exposure in COMICS INTERVIEW, by now you've surely seen issues #7 and #8, each of which devoted space to the English comics scene. Always happy to oblige — especially when we can anticipate such requests and satisfy them in advance. We are always open to interviews from other countries, and intend eventually to cover everyone in comics everywhere.

Finally, Ramsey Campbell sounds like a surefire subject for COMICS INTERVIEW, so consider this an impatient "what are you waiting for!" (Oh, and Ali — you forgot to send money.)

—DAK

NEXT ISSUE: Hot young star-artist *John Romita, Jr.* traces his startlingly swift rise at Marvel Comics — from IRON MAN to SPIDER-MAN to the best-selling X-MEN — and beyond! Complete with his sometimes surprising comments on the X-MEN (and *Chris Claremont*), and a word or three about some of John's future plans for introducing new characters to the series! Also: From ROCKETEER to SUN RUNNERS — *David Scroggy* tells what's in the works at Pacific Comics! Lots more — including a colorful X-MEN cover by *John Romita, Jr.* — in COMICS INTERVIEW #11! Plus: An exciting surprise announcement!

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